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ALS OF
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THE TRIALS OF COMMANDER McTURK

BY C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1906

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN KETTLE

MR. HORROCKS, PURSER

THE FILIBUSTERS

THE LOST CONTINENT

THE LITTLE RED CAPTAIN

THE RECIPE FOR DIAMONDS

THE PARADISE COAL BOAT

THROUGH ARCTIC LAPLAND

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN KETTLE

THOMPSON'S PROGRESS

CAPTAIN KETTLE, K.C.B.

McTODD

ATOMS OF EMPIRE

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	ANNEXED IN ERROR	1
II.	THE VALUE OF A STEAM BLOCKADE	32
III.	THE WESTERN OCEAN PIRATE	64
IV.	THE BALANCE OF POWER	94
V.	GREY-GREEN POWDER	124
VI.	THE SULTANA	154
VII.	MARGHERITA PEARLS	184
VIII.	TAKING WATER	212
IX.	MANOA	240
X.	THE McMECHIE SUBMARINE	268
XI.	KIDNAPPED	294
XII.	THE GLORIOUS RESTORATION	321

TO

E.

THE TRIALS OF COMMANDER McTURK

Chapter I

ANNEXED IN ERROR

Commander John Kelly McTurk was seated on a green up-ended gin-case, with a trimly booted heel under each elbow, busily employed in putting his impressions of Mana-o-loa harbour on to a three-feet-by-two canvas. His medium was oil-colour; his method called largely for the use of thumb and palette knife; and although even he did not consider the painting in any way complete, it already showed symptoms of being much on a par with his previous works.

It was a curious trait of J. K. McTurk's pictures that no one was ever yet known to guess the subject correctly, and further, that few people with anything like perfect eyesight could gaze upon their colour scheme without painful emotion. Commander McTurk modestly said himself he was "a bit of an impressionist."

The square green gin-case, a piece of jetsam from the vague Pacific, was the only available seat on the dazzling white sand of the beach,

and it cramped a man who measured six foot three to squat on it for more than an hour at a stretch. So when he had thumbed in a zigzagged streak of white to represent the breakers on the barrier reef, and a square of rasping green to mark the roof of the German Consulate, Commander McTurk stood up and gingerly straightened himself.

"Ouch!" he said, "that's cramping. But it's worth the trouble. In a week from now that picture will be history: 'Mana-o-loa before it was annexed to the United States.'"

He looked round the glaring beach to make sure that no one was in sight, and then hurriedly adjusted his yellow wig, so as to show less forehead. He was very sensitive on the matter of this uneasy hair, and was probably the only man in the United States Navy who was ignorant of the fact that he was agreeably known in that service as Wiggy McTurk.

As though she had been delicately waiting till this item of the toilette had been completed, a girl stepped out from behind a palmetto clump into view of the beach, saw Commander McTurk, and waved him a friendly greeting. She was dressed in crisp white muslins, and had a plaited muslin band round her panama, and under that outrageous sun she gave the eye a treat in coolness. As she came nearer, McTurk moved up the beach so as to feast his gaze upon her against the ultramarine background of the harbour water.

She caught his idea, and laughed. She wagged a slim finger at him. "Yes," she chaffed, "and you said last night, at Mr. McMechie's, that you

were not a lady's man, but merely a boorish sailor. Well, commend me to sailors for subtle compliments."

"Oh, I never made the least pretence at not admiring you, Mrs. Derringer. Let me see: I saw you first up-town at Delmonico's in New York, then at the Hotel Cecil in London, then at that Theatre Port Saint-Something in Paris, where the seats are so narrow you can't straighten your knees; and then of all places you turn up on McMechie's plantation in Mana-o-loa. Now, Mrs. Derringer, if I'd adored you silently in America and Europe, could I do less than tell you so when we meet on a Pacific coral heap to speak to one another for the first time?"

Mrs. Derringer inspected the cleanliness of the green gin-case with a cautious finger, and then sat herself upon it and looked out upon the twinkling blues of the Pacific. "I wonder," she said thoughtfully, "where we shall meet next? Neither you nor I will be allowed to stay much longer in these islands, that's certain."

Commander McTurk stiffened. "Ah," he rasped, "that's news to me. You and I, Mrs. Derringer, are both, I believe, United States citizens, and law-abiding citizens at that; and if our consul here does have a chewed-string backbone, it doesn't follow we haven't stiffer set-up men left at home."

Mrs. Derringer waved a slim white hand to where four ugly obsolete warships bucked over the heavy harbour swells. "There are two Germans," she pointed out.

"One's got no engines and the other's no guns.

And both have got boilers as thin as a rusted cracker-tin. Neither of them could heave up and steam out against the bit of a breeze there is to-day."

"The Britisher, I believe, is the pick of the fleet."

"Well, she can steam, if you count that. But she's no armament. Chasing seal poachers is about all she's good for."

"Still," Mrs. Derringer pointed out, "she's better than our poor old Yankee relic."

"That's a solid fact," said McTurk savagely. "If it came to a pinch, our man would fight her till she sank, but as it is, it takes him all his time to keep her afloat with his guns housed."

"But," persisted Mrs. Derringer, "it seems Captain Shaw won't fight. He told Mr. McMechie so at breakfast this morning, up at the plantation. He says his orders from Washington are plain: under no circumstances is he to bring about international complications."

"Huh!" snorted McTurk. "That's politics. That's some saloon corner-man stretching his hand right out here across the Pacific, and using the Navy as a cat's paw. Well, if Shaw's a strong man, he'll know how to disregard instructions if he considers that doing so is for the good of the United States. I know that's what I'd consider duty if I were in command here."

"That's quite believable, on your previous record," said Mrs. Derringer drily. It was a sore point, and she knew it.

"Well," said McTurk judicially, "the circumstances were very much as they are here: it was

a case of whether I cared to act for my own interest or for the United States, and of course there was no choice. The States pulled off the deal, and I was disowned, just to save somebody's face. As you know," he added, with a sigh, "I've been on the retired list ever since."

"Mr. McMechie was commenting on it. He further said that, as Captain Shaw intended to act by routine, and let the Germans, or the French, or the Johnny Bulls bounce themselves into possession of Mana-o-loa, he thought it quite on the cards that Commander J. K. McTurk would bring off a *coup d'état*, and put the States in possession of these islands, and himself back on the active list of the Navy all in that same *coup*. I wonder if it will come off."

McTurk stared wistfully out over the tumbling blue-and-white waters. "I wonder too," he muttered.

Mrs. Derringer stood up, and tapped a little sand from her remarkably neat shoe on the green side of the gin-case. "Walk with me back to the plantation, will you?" she asked. "This beach will be no place to sit on presently. Look at the way the Trades have been blowing these last two days. We're in for a hurricane directly. There, don't laugh at me for being weatherwise. You must remember I was brought up in these islands."

They left the white beach and passed through the coast fringe of vegetation to a good hard road beyond. The foliage of the palm trees rattled to the growing gale with a dry noise like hail on a corrugated iron roof. The groups of natives,

that an hour before had been talking excited politics, were breaking up as the portents of the storm became more clamorous. On the roofs of the native houses, which nestled here and there in clearings by the roadside, brown-skinned Kanakas were working with unaccustomed energy, with sennit rope and coral lump, to make fast the thatch against the tearing fingers of the greater gale that was to come. The temperature had gone down to 65° Fahrenheit, and nipped the whole island world with its unaccustomed chill.

Once, before they got to the higher ground, they were given a glimpse of the harbour, foam-flecked, and framed between swaying tree-trunks. The warships, with their heavy crews, were ant-hills for industry. They were all sending down their old-fashioned topmasts and yards, and other top hamper. They were securing boats, guns, and deck-fittings. From the stern of each a white fan of wake boiled out, to show that already they had commenced to steam up to their anchors. An hour ago they were all ready to fly at one another's throats. Now their common enemy, the sea, had bidden them strip for a battle far more perilous.

Mrs. Derringer was a woman of middle height, but when they both stood upright her head only reached to Commander McTurk's shoulder. He had clapped a hand under her arm to help her against some of the heavier blasts of the gale; but as these grew more and more stupendous his hold changed, and they crept along with fingers interlocked and arms at tension.

Besides being difficult, the road was becoming dangerous. Great mopheaded cabbage palms swooped down at them after the fashion of ancient ballistas; a raffle of sand, dust, twigs, and leaves sang through the air like shot; and with growing frequency great branches, torn from parent stems, strode across the roadway like some uncouth automata. Once the roof of a house—a clanging tambourine made of beaten-out kerosene tins—charged after them down the road. Once a drove of pigs, hideously terrified, fawned upon them for comfort and protection.

At length they came to the solid stone house of the German consul, and McTurk nodded towards it and laughed.

"I can't help it," gasped Mrs. Derringer. "Enemy or no enemy, we must stay with Mr. Wagner till the storm eases. This wind takes all my breath away, and I don't seem to have owned a hairpin for days."

A stout, hospitable German admitted them, and with difficulty shut the door again. "It's an ill hurricane dot blows nobody no goot," he observed. "Mrs. Derringer, zere is druce between Chermany und United States while dze wind lasts, zo you may smile at me as you used to smile mitout disloyalty. Will you haf coffee?"

"My dear man," said the lady, almost hysterically, "I'll have a room to myself, and a looking-glass, and some hairpins if you've got any. Nothing short of all those will comfort me for the present."

"Mine housegeeper shall brovide," said Wagner; and under the guidance of a comely brown lady,

Mrs. Derringer presently went further into the house.

"Sit down," said Herr Wagner to his other guest. "Sit down, und I will bring you beer. To-morrow possibly we will shoot one another, und you are a bad shot, I hear, und I am a big mark; but while zis hurricane lasts we will not shoot, we will trink. Zo?"

"Right you are!" said McTurk. "I owe my throat a wetting after all the sand and sundries that have scoured it this last half-hour."

"I give you toast. Here's congratulations dat we are safe ashore instead of tossing at sea like our countrymens is on deir steamboats."

"My dear Wagner, that's where you make a mistake. If those poor ducks were at sea they'd weather the blow easy enough. But they're not at sea: they're in this infernal rat-trap of a harbour; and I don't believe the ground-tackle's forged that could hold them through this blow. They were all of them steaming to their anchors for all they were worth an hour since, and it's grown a hundred times worse since then."

"Zo? I haf later news. From the housetob above I see dze Johnny Bull slip his caples und steam out for the pass. Glosh! you should see the surf on the reef!"

"I must go and watch this."

"Man, you stay where you are, und trink dze good beer dot is brovided. Up there on the roof it would blow off your w——" he was going to say "wig," but with a fat giggle substituted "head."

"You can't scare me," said McTurk stiffly,

" with a capful of wind. The rest of the beer can wait. I must see those ships."

He made his way up the ladder and through a door on to the roof. Herr Wagner, when the warships of his country recently threatened to bombard Mana-o-loa, had painted his roof a rasping green, so as to catch the eye of gunners, and warn them to send their shells wide. The German Consul's house stood conspicuous also by position, so any one who occupied its roof was not likely to be up there long before he or she was observed by every resident in Mana-o-loa who happened to be awake and out-of-doors.

But Commander McTurk was careless of being overseen. His clothes filled and ballooned out in the wind. His hat blew away. He had to clutch at his wig to save that from following. His eye was held by a single picture. Away there in the jaws of the ship passage, His Britannic Majesty's corvette *Panther* reared over outrageous rollers, and fought her way to sea.

Presently he allowed himself side glances, and saw the *König Friedrich der Grosse* leap from her anchors, broach-to, hit the beach, roll on to her starboard bilge, and stab at the vegetation beyond it with her mast-trucks. He took another look at the struggling Englishman, and turned to see the other German ship follow her consort; and whilst his gaze was still pinned upon that misty, surf-fogged tragedy, the poor old United States *Minnehaha*, with her anchors ploughing up the harbour floor, took the ground stern first, and beat herself slowly into primitive plates, whilst her people squattered ashore as best they could. As fighting

machines the three warships were annihilated inside six short minutes. And still in the ship-passage, steaming full-speed into the hurricane, the *Panther* just held her own.

A hand shook Commander McTurk's bony shoulder, and a voice bawled in his ear, "Man! come awa' below."

"Hullo, Mr. McMechie!"

"Come awa', man. If the Britisher gets a hot bearing, he'll be ashore with the rest of them; if he doesna, he'll blow awa' oot o' ken to the sooth. Now's the time for the United States to annex Mana-o-loa."

Mr. McMechie's black and yellow eye shone with excitement, and Mr. McMechie's great fleshy beak of a nose looked more predatory than ever. Commander McTurk went down into the house with him, and although the hurricane bumped and roared around them with unbated fury, they could hear one another speak in the Consul's sitting-room with comparative ease.

"Where's Wagner?" asked McTurk.

"Gone to assist his fellow-sausages; and much good he'll do. No, sit you quiet. Our fellows on the *Minnehaha* will be all right. They've foreseen this, and had a hawser ashore four hours back. They'll do the tight-rope act without a scrap o' deeficulty."

"That's likely. But what's this you say about The States annexing these islands? Mrs. Derringer told me Shaw had special orders from Washington to do nothing of the sort."

"That's correct, my boy; but I guess you are not Shaw."

"No, sir," said McTurk grimly. "Captain Shaw is on the active list of the Navy. I am not."

"Well, there you are. Shaw knows what's wanted, but he's tied hand and foot by political considerations, and daren't move. Now you will know a soft thing when you see it."

"Not necessarily. I bought a cotton plantation here in Mana-o-loa for $9,000, which was all my available loose cash. I thought it would be an interest for an idle man. But when I come out here, what do I find? Why, that the agent who sold, omitted to mention that sensitive plant had taken charge, and would cost me far more to remove than the cotton could ever be worth."

"My boy, under certain circumstances I would give you $19,000 for your plantation."

"Hullo! how's that? Think there's a gold-mine on it?"

"No, merely a toughish proposition in cotton."

"Then you must be talking a fairy tale."

Mr. McMechie was getting excited, and the adopted Scottish veneer was dropping away from him, and the ancestral Moses peeping out. He was beginning to wave explanatory palms, and to fall back upon a certain Semitic lisp.

"Now, my boy, look at me. Do I theem like a fairy? I repeat that under thertain thircumstances I will pay you $19,000 for the land you gave $9,000 for, and which you thay isn't worth nine thents to you to-day."

"I guess," said McTurk, "I'd better hear those 'circumstances' before we go further."

"I want to see these islands annexed to the United States. Everybody wants it except a

small clique of interested politicians at home, and you know what politicians are."

"Swine."

"Just thwine." Mr. McMechie uttered the unclean word with true racial abhorrence. "And Shaw is under their orders. But you are not. You have position; you are a naval man; and, best of all, for the moment you are not under official orders. You know what is for the country's good——"

"I don't see the United States need lose sleep over my having bought a plantation of sensitive plant."

"Nossir. The United States is concerned with the islands as a whole, and you are the man to bring off a *coup de main* which would give it them."

"Well," said Commander McTurk thoughtfully, "I guess I could bring that off without any blunder if I was convinced it was the right thing."

"But, my boy"—the explanatory palms were in full action now—"my dear boy, I'm offering you $19,000. Come now, we'll make it $20,000. Howth that?"

"Of course," said McTurk thoughtfully, "if I imagined you were offering me, a naval officer and a gentleman, Mr. McMechie, a mere vulgar bribe to do your work for you, I should knock you down. As it is, I'll just say the matter is too deep for me, and leave it at that. Wish ye good day, Mr. McMechie. I'm going back to the roof to see if that Johnny Bull has forced his ship out to sea, or whether he's piled her up with the other poor old scrap-heaps on the beach."

Now, I do not exactly know what arguments McMechie used with Mrs. Derringer, neither do I know how that trim little lady later on overcame the scruples of Commander J. K. McTurk. Mr. McMechie, when I asked him about it, placidly told me several glib and obvious lies; and McTurk, in reply to a blunt inquiry, with equal bluntness told me to go somewhere considerably hotter than Mana-o-loa at its very hottest. And as for the lady, I frankly confess to lacking courage to tackle her on the subject at all. But then of course, after what happened later, one is hardly able to speak with her now privately.

Still, anyway, the result of these two interviews very soon became apparent. Commander McTurk was lured down from the roof, and presently left Herr Wagner's house on Herr Wagner's pet riding mare, which he had requisitioned without leave. He made his way across the desolated isle, still having to battle with the lees of the gale, and in due course arrived (with the mare well-nigh foundered) at the little harbour of Mameetee, which is tucked securely away on the island's leeward flank.

Here was a schooner, an ordinary small trader of Polynesia, officered by white men, and manned by a brown crew. McTurk applied for a charter of the schooner to Honolulu, and, as he made instant sailing a first condition, got soundly laughed at for his pains. But, having once been persuaded to attempt McMechie's *coup de main* (always, be it understood, entirely on behalf of the United States), Commander McTurk was not the man to boggle over a small matter of piracy.

He lured ashore the three white ruffians who formed the schooner's afterguard with the promise of drink, and at the end of a six hours' bout had the felicity of knowing that they slept stertorously.

Thereafter (somewhat flushed, and with wig the least bit awry) he pulled off to the schooner, and announced and proved to the Kanaka crew that he was captain and intended to have all orders accurately obeyed. Casual observers always thought that Commander McTurk was too lean and lathy to have much physical strength packed away within his boundaries, and shipmates " in the know " had often (in Naval days) made sly half-dollars out of this deceptiveness. As a matter of fact the man was a bundle of bone and muscle; and as moreover his arms were abnormally long, even for his great height, and his skill with his fists extremely fine, he was perhaps as awkward a customer to tackle as could be found on all the lands of the Pacific.

The nine Kanakas then of the schooner's crew fell into the common error. They saw a white man whom they did not know, and when he told them he had usurped the position of their lawful masters, the captain, the mate, and the supercargo, they listened with open minds. When he further ordered them to hoist close-reefed canvas, to unmoor, and run out into the butt-end of a hurricane, why then, the transition to words and blows was natural. Nevertheless, within eight short minutes eight much-bruised Kanaka sailormen were carrying out Commander J. K.McTurk's brisk orders, and number nine only refused duty

because he happened to be stunned and senseless. Commander McTurk viewed with high distaste the meagre toilette arrangements in the schooner's after-house when he retired below to put himself tidy after everything had been satisfactorily adjusted.

Of the safe voyaging of that borrowed schooner over tremendous seas to Honolulu I do not intend to write here at present; nor also for obvious reasons can I give away details of how, aided by McMechie's Honolulu agent, McTurk got hold of the s.s. *Balena* with her extremely businesslike Hotchkiss gun. In theory the Hotchkiss was supposed to be for the benefit of piratical Malay proas or thievish Formosa junks; but as for the last five years the *Balena* had been employed in pelagic and beach sealing, up by the Pribyloffs, that tale should be received with doubt. However, the gun was a thoroughly sound weapon, and there were also on board twenty-five hundred rounds of ammunition for it, common shell for the most part.

For a crew of this impromptu man-of-war, McTurk scoured the beach of Honolulu, a spot which is popularly supposed to compete with the sea front of Callao for the palm of blackguardism. But J. K. McTurk was a capable man of his own hands, and very full of a fine confidence. He personally knew himself to have been the best man at handling men in all the United States Navy; and if the U.S. Navy Board failed to value the faculty, well, no one appreciated their loss more than he did.

Within reasonable limits McMechie's Honolulu

agent gave him a free hand with money; and aided partly by this convincing argument, and partly by his own personal magnetism, he soon crammed the *Balena* with men and stores. Then he took her up to the hulk and bunkered lavishly, and presently, with decks full of coal and men, steamed out to sea just in time to avoid arrest. Governments had heard of his outfitting, and (remembering the *Balena's* previous record) had diagnosed an armed and extensive raid on protected seal rookeries. But McMechie's agent was a co-religionist of his own, and the news, as is usual in Israelitish circles, came in to him a little before it reached the Gentile who was to make the arrest; and the officers of the guard boat (with a wink) quite agreed that their signal to heave-to could not have been seen, on account of volumes of black smoke belched forth from the *Balena's* Japanese coal.

"Funny go," said the second in command, when they were eventually out at sea; "but you dum nearly got arrested there, Captain, for something you never did and never intended to do. Funny sort of packet, this old *Balena*. They say she's made the fortunes of six men all out of sealskins, and all by ways which can't be talked about."

"It's a black nuisance," said McTurk, "and that's a fact. We've a quite tough enough job ahead without the extra handicap, and it's my belief that this sealskin racket (which we've nothing on earth to do with) is going to cause as much trouble as we've any use for. Well, Mr. Stubbs, you can turn up the hands now, and serve out rifles and cutlasses. They're a most

forsaken lot of rapscallions, but luckily most of them seem to have deserted from an army or a navy some time or other, so they should know the rudiments. Anyway, we've got just three days to teach them the whole art of drill and soldiering."

Now, here on the *Balena* was displayed quite a different Commander McTurk from the somewhat indolent gentleman of the palette knife and the polite conversation with Mrs. Derringer—though it must be owned that it was the fascination of Mrs. Derringer which had been largely concerned in setting him off on his present adventures. McTurk had donned a U.S.N. Commander's uniform, and had strapped a sword to his hip. He was the spruce naval officer, a little stiff in manner, and very much inclined to be formal.

His crew were as unruly a gang as ever shipped, and, seeing the circumstances under which they joined, were quite equal to have been oppressively friendly with the after-guard. But the sight of their tall, precise chief chilled them. Here was not the genial soul who had lured them to enlist; here was an American naval officer, a man in exact uniform, an official radiating vague power. They snapped up hands to their caps in unaccustomed salute whenever the ship's duties brought them in his neighbourhood.

But, even with this initial victory of discipline, matters ran by no means smoothly at first. When the crew heard that the *Balena* was on a filibustering expedition, with the object of annexing an island called Mana-o-loa to the United

States, at first they stared, and then they laughed. But not one soul of them showed any enthusiasm. They had not been enlisted with any stated object in view, as to have done so would of course have entailed a stoppage of the *Balena* at the outset: a significant smile was the only answer to those who inquired the object of the voyage; and these, knowing the *Balena's* past reputation, translated the smile to mean seal-poaching—so small is the value of significant smiles.

Even Stubbs, the second in command, was not told what lay ahead till they were clear of Honolulu. But Stubbs was a brazen adventurer; Stubbs didn't care: one scuffle was just as good as another to Stubbs. As usual, he only saw the humorous side.

"Funny part of it is," said he, "I believe I am a German by birth myself. However, if the game pleases you, and you're paying me for it, that's enough for me. I'm sure I don't mind giving our Kaiser a bit of a smack on his vanity."

"I thought," said McTurk with a frown, "that when I named you first lieutenant, Mr. Stubbs, you were a United States citizen."

"Funny thing is everybody else does the same. But my old man was some sort of a Dutchman that never even learned English, and used the name of Spiegelizen, or something like that, and got paid small wages accordingly. There was a chap that worked beside him called Stubbs, who hadn't half the head. But he got double the pay, just because they daren't put him on a Dutchman's wage. So it seemed to me there was money in 'Stubbs,' and I very naturally lifted the name for

further use. I suppose at the same time that made me some sort of a Yankee."

"You don't seem possessed of very much love for either country or family, Mr. Stubbs."

"Oh, one country's as good to me as another, so long as it's a white man's country—say Britain or the States; but about family I guess you're wrong, Cap. I'm hot on family. I just live for my family. I'd do 'most anything to keep it amused and fed; and if you want to see the members of my family, they're standing right here now before you under this hat I'm going to touch."

With the one exception of Stubbs, all the men J. K. McTurk had picked as his officers developed weaknesses, which, remembering the pit (namely Honolulu beach) from which they were digged, was not surprising. The engineers were incompetent mechanics, and slept on watch; the navigating lieutenant turned out to be a fraud who had never seen a sextant; another lieutenant executed the dance of St. Vitus in moments of excitement, and called forth laughter instead of obedience whenever he gave an order; and of the rest, all had an overmastering weakness. Moreover, every man jack of them drank himself full to the teeth on the smallest possible opportunity.

But Stubbs was a tower of strength, and, to carry out the simile, Commander McTurk was at the very least an armoured turret. McTurk never had cause to strike his men. But the sight of his long wiry form in the precise uniform, with the hands clasped behind the back, and the red clean-shaven jaw-muscles hard set, always had the effect of reducing the most mutinous

and incompetent of the crew to efficiency and obedience.

Stubbs was not the smart naval lieutenant Commander McTurk wished for, but he was the Yankee bucko mate to perfection. He had fought himself on to the quarter-deck through sheer weight of metal, and he had stayed there through plain competency. His only reason for leaving the Chilian navy (where it seemed he had held a considerable command) was some trifling political complication, during the course of which he had used a greenheart belaying-pin too freely on the heads of brother officers.

Lieutenant Stubbs had a mania for greenheart belaying-pins. He brought one on board in his kit; and whether he was drilling the crew of the Hotchkiss gun, or teaching the small-arm manual to the rest of the deck-hands, the rounded butt of this favourite weapon always showed somewhere or other through his clothes.

The *Balena* steamed untidily on over blue, sun-baked seas, that were for the most part desert, and only twice did she meet with other craft. But, as coincidence would have it, each of these knew her, and edged in to meet her course.

The first was a steamboat of some 800 tons, badly rust-streaked, and short of a foremast. When she came within hail, a bearded man on her upper bridge, who carried one arm in a dirty sling, vouchsafed this information: "Hey, you *Balena*! Don't you go back to them old beaches. 'Tain't healthy there now. They durned nearly got us, and I guess they're all fixed up and ready

for you when you come. What's that? Oh, we know all about your having dropped seal-poaching. But I'm just giving you a friendly hint in return for that protection boat you sunk for me off the Pribyloffs. It's a straight cinch——"

They saw him gesticulating on long after he had dropped astern out of ear-shot.

The other acquaintance sailed a smart schooner, and wanted help to seize and loot some Chinese bird's-nesting junks somewhere down Java way. "It's a soft thing," pronounced this second tempter, "and just the *Balena's* job. Line our pockets nicely, too. You know what a price nests have gone to now in all the China ports, since old Tommy Haines tried to raid the fleet, and they all blew up together."

"Funny sort of crowd there must have been on this packet before," commented Stubbs as the schooner dropped astern. "Seems to me you might log our blessed *Balena* as a dum pirate, and not be exactly wiping your boots on her reputation."

"It's this confounded reputation that will trip us, I'm afraid," said his superior officer crustily. "I'd reckoned out my risks in capturing Mana-o-loa, and all the plan of campaign to a nicety, but I never figured on sailing in a craft that's wanted by every policeman in the Pacific, and that's a fact."

"Well, it's all experience."

"I suppose so. But it's not experience I want from a professional point of view. The only excuse that I can have as a United States naval officer for what I'm going to do, Mr. Stubbs, is

success: if I can bring the thing off, I shall be able to write a private report to the Secretary of the Naval Department on 'Sudden and Well-directed Raids,' which will be of high value; but if the reputation of this infernal steamboat trips us, I am free to own to you that professionally I shall be in a very ugly place. Our Navy Department," he added, with a sigh, "means to be just, I honestly believe, but it is damnably unsympathetic."

They ran to a point just beyond sight of Mana-o-loa about the time of the sunset, and lay-to there on a sea spread with such colour that Commander McTurk's fingers fairly itched for tubes of oil-colour and a broad-gauge palette-knife. Thereafter, under easy steam, they made the islands, passed through that channel of the reef down which the *Panther* had so pluckily fought a passage, and crept quietly into an empty harbour without hoot of whistle or rattle of gear.

The noise of anchoring was avoided by picking up some one's abandoned mooring, and before the hands had more than stared at the loom of the wrecked warships that cluttered the beach, boats were called away, and Commander McTurk led an armed landing-party for the shore. On board the *Balena*, Lieutenant Stubbs trained the Hotchkiss on the staring green roof of the German Consul's house, not from any racial antipathy, as he cheerfully explained, but merely because it was the most distinctive spot he could see on which to align his sights.

Their reception on shore was peculiar, and, to men wound up for action, a trifle disappointing.

The trade wind boomed over the isle and rattled the leaves of the palm-trees together with a noise like hail on an iron roof; the crews of the wrecked warships and the few white residents snored in the houses; and if sundry brown Kanaka ears did hear suspicious sounds, their wearers were far too fearsome of ghosts to venture upon excursions into the dark.

With the least excuse for violence, the thin nail-paring of moon that sailed amongst the clouds of the trade would have looked down upon tragedy. As it was, the situation trembled on the edge of farce. If there had only been some one to oppose him, if there had only been a palace, a government house, yes, even a municipal building to seize and occupy, Commander McTurk could have seen his way with clearness. But the late king's dwelling, a rude shanty of wood and thatch, which he had intended to capture, had been accidentally burned during the hurricane, and since then official business had been conducted from consulates.

"By Glory!" snapped McTurk, "I'll make our own consulate into Government House," and forthwith turned his lengthy strides in that direction, and was duly followed by his ruffianly escort.

The United States Consul had, perhaps luckily for himself, gone away for the night on business, and the native servants of the consulate were easily impressed into obedience by McTurk's mere personality and uniform. So the next steps were simple. A dated notice was carried round by an armed guard to all the other consulates,

which stated that "These Islands of Mana-o-loa are this day annexed to the United States of America, and the hoisting of any other country's flag will be looked upon as an act of war, and dealt with accordingly." The order was dished up in orthodox official form, and signed "J. K. McTurk, Commander U.S.N.," and the personal appearance of the escort, if it did not guarantee the document as genuine, at any rate hinted that trouble would promptly follow upon disobedience.

These preparations, then, were gone through with order and dexterity; and when dawn flared up lemon-yellow from the eastern levels of the Pacific, McTurk ordered the hoisting of a large Stars and Stripes on the consulate flagstaff, and formally annexed the group of islands in the name of his country. As it was thought best to keep the Hotchkiss loaded, the twenty-one-gun salute which honoured the ceremony was fired from a rifle, in default of other heavy artillery.

And now followed on a period of some strain. Captain Shaw and the United States consul were away camping in the mountains, and there they discreetly remained. The crew of the wrecked *Minnehaha*, though pressed by McTurk to join his command, said that they were distressed mariners and intended to eat the bread of idleness. The crews of the German warships grumbled, but, in view of the *Balena's* Hotchkiss and their own unarmed condition, did nothing more. The non-American portion of the resident Europeans were frankly and coldly hostile.

"Never mind," said Mr. McMechie, at the end

of that first very trying day. "In the face of a very considerable force you have captured the whole place without bloodshed, and set up a new government."

"Yes," said McTurk with some complacency, "I've done all that. I can write a very valuable private report to our Navy Department on that."

"The only thing is to consolidate what we've got. There's no cable here to interrupt, and as the C.P.R. boat's evidently missed her call, there's no mail-boat due for another fortnight. If we can steady down the island in that time, and show that our government—our Yankee government, my boy—has got the place well in hand, why, then Washington will never dare to disown us."

"By Glory! There'd be a pretty big howl if they did."

"But you must consolidate, Captain McTurk. Till you've got your government riveted down into the soil here, with the rivets headed up, no property on the island can come to its full value."

"That's my plantation he's thinking about," guessed McTurk, but he was too delicate-minded to say so. Mr. McMechie also forbore to touch on sordid commercial details, and so the subject did not come up.

McTurk saw Mrs. Derringer that night. She looked white, he thought, and pinched. Her manner was a trifle excited. "All hail!" she cried, "to the Dictator! This is a model revolution. No pronunciamentos, no shooting, no fuss

—merely effectiveness. I have all a woman's admiration for a strong man."

"What I did was done entirely at your invitation," he reminded her.

"And Mr. McMechie's."

"McMechie put the matter so—shall we say crudely—that I was within an ace of breaking his neck."

She laughed. "You certainly have a wonderful way with people. The Europeans here are all too jealous of one another to make trouble, and the natives are as quiet as mice."

"It's the natives who may be troublesome."

"Not at all. The thing took them by surprise, and they will occupy the next six months in deciding whether they like the new rule or not. By that time we shall be firmly anchored. You must remember I was mostly brought up in the islands till . . . I went away."

"To get married?"

"Yes, I did marry when I went away."

McTurk reached for her hand and held it in a steady grip. "Do you think you can forget that husband sufficiently to take another—to take me? You know what you said when you started me off on this expedition?"

"Please, please, stop."

"No, dear, I must go through with it now. I went just because you said you'd listen to me if I brought the thing off successfully. I want to know——"

"Captain McTurk, you must, you shall listen to me before you say another word. You asked me about my husband, and I told you I hadn't

seen him for five years, and had heard he was dead. Well, news has come to me that he isn't dead."

Commander McTurk jumped to his feet. "But how is this?" he gasped. "You say one thing when I leave the island, and now you say another; and yet no mail has come in since I left. How can this news have arrived?"

You brought it yourself on the *Balena.*"

"What, a mail?"

"No—my husband."

"I brought your husband?"

"Unfortunately I saw him in the street, so there is no mistake about the matter. I hear he calls himself Stubbs now."

Commander McTurk took a letter from the table and slowly tore it into small squares.

"Stubbs," he said. "Of German extraction he told me, and latterly from Chili. Stubbs, your husband!"

He took another letter and tore that into small accurate triangles.

"Well," he said, "if I can be of any further use to you at any time, you may command me. Good-bye."

The move that followed was as wholesome as it was unexpected. There steamed into the harbour of Mana-o-loa a big, fine, bouncing armoured cruiser of the first class, seventy-five hundred tons in measurement, of surpassing ugliness and surpassing strength. There was United States written big all over her for the nautical eye to read, and for laymen her nationality was adver-

tised by a fluttering Stars and Stripes. She had been on the China station, and had called in at the islands (at the command of a cablegram) on her road home. She bristled up to an anchorage, trained about twenty-three big guns on to the *Balena* (in reply to some piece of nervous impertinence on the part of the Hotchkiss), and boarded her with an armed boat inside five minutes.

And then, for all her smartness, she seemed to pause.

Presently a shore boat came alongside her ladder in reply to a quiet hail, took something, headed for a wharf, and set a man ashore. Then and not before did the big white cruiser lower, man, and arm several more boats with astonishing deliberation, and finally transport a small army in the most leisurely fashion to the beach.

"Und dey call dose Yankees schmardt!" growled Herr Consul Wagner disgustedly. "Teufel! But I would like dem to see a landing bardy of Chermans!"

On the hard white beach before the wharf, faced by the Club, the Planters' House, and the principle stores, the cruiser's captain formed up his men and made proclamation.

"Is Lalee-all-aro here?" he asked.

A stout and elderly native, who was seated under the verandah of the hotel, got up and bowed with some surprise. "That is my name, sir."

"Might I ask Your Majesty to step across here?"

One could almost feel Mana-o-loa rustle with the shock—though it was probably only the palm leaves in the Trade, as usual.

Lalee-all-aro stepped out in the baking tropical sunshine, visibly shaken.

The cruiser's captain gave a sharp command, and his men clanked to the salute.

"Your Majesty," said the captain, "the United States and Great Britain, being the Powers principally concerned, have decided to put your Majesty on the throne of these islands, the appointment to date from ten days back. As they have stated their will upon the matter, I am sure they will not be called upon by the interference of any other Power to uphold your Majesty's appointment by force of arms. I think that's the lot. God save the King!"

"But," said His Majesty, "the islands have already been annexed by——"

"The islands," retorted the captain of the cruiser quickly, "are your Majesty's, as I have had the honour to state. I know nothing and wish to know nothing of any further details of their history. If you will honour me by being my country's guest on the only bit of territory my country holds hereabouts—and that's the U.S. Consulate—I shall be honoured. To prevent mistakes, I have brought a dozen of wine and some cold beef ashore in my boat."

At the U.S. Consulate there was no Commander McTurk. That tall officer was seated with his wig drawn well down over his forehead, and his face puckered with thought, in a room up at McMechie's. Before him was a letter written

by an old shipmate, who happened also to be the captain of the cruiser. It ran thus:

"*My dear old Idiot,*

"*I am most abominably sorry to spoil sport. But as usual it was your own ridiculous fault. What on earth do you want to do your filibustering in such a notorious boat as the* Balena *for? She's pirate, seal poacher, opium smuggler, and about ten blame' other things she shouldn't be. It's her I came in here after, not you, you old duck. And then, to crown all, your fool Number One must needs turn on his penny tin thunder at me.*

"*But having come in here after the seal poacher, of course I had to chip in at the other game. Oh, you dear old J. K., how I would have loved to see you hoist Old Glory, and say your piece! I wouldn't have tripped you for* $1000. *But being here I had to. It seems the* Panther *carried out news that we and the Britishers and the blessed Dutchmen were biting thumbs at one another over these tin-pot islands; and as our man either thought the contract too big or the chips of doubtful value, I guess he and John Bull just put their heads together over a bottle of wine, and thought out the way they could rile the Dutchmen most. I forget what the new king's name is, but I've got it jotted down on paper, and can bring it up when the time comes. He's a native, anyway. I hope you haven't shot him or anything.*

"*I had a letter from your sister Bridget, by the way, telling me you were philandering after some girl or other (so she'd heard), and I was to warn you off, as she was a Britisher. She added in a P.S., 'I hear the hussy is a Vermonter, which is worse.' So*

there's your warning, J. K., and don't say I haven't told you. The old dear knew I was on the Pacific station, and felt sure I should meet you, as you were in the Pacific too. She seems to think small potatoes of the Pacific anyhow.

"Now time presses, and I must get to the point. Seriously, old man, you must clear out and not let me catch you. As you know quite well, all our chums of the old Anapolis days would shout with laughter if they heard I'd hung J. K. McTurk for usurping a darkey's vacant throne; but honestly I'd hate to do it.

"There's one more tip I want to give you. There's a Jew with a Scotch name in these islands, you'd do best to keep to windward of.

"Goodbye, old cock.

"Yours unofficially,

"Daren't sign my name."

"I wonder," mused McTurk, "how my sister Bridget got to hear about Mrs. Derringer."

Chapter II

THE VALUE OF A STEAM BLOCKADE

"Br-r-r-m-m-n-n-!" went another deep-noted syren, and, for the twenty-fifth time within twenty-five minutes, Commander McTurk poked his long neck as far as it would go out into the fog, and then gave to the nervous quartermaster on the *Paisley's* upper bridge another change of course.

The fog was a winter fog of the Yellow Sea, and it was icily cold; but for the twenty-fifth time the stout Semitic gentleman in the fur coat wiped beads of perspiration away from his forehead. "You'll drive her over the top of one of them yet," he chattered.

"Shouldn't wonder," said McTurk, pleasantly. "Steady, on to your course, quartermaster."

"And with picric acid for the larger part of our cargo, a collision would mean that we all blow to smithereens."

"You've said that twenty-five times already within the last two hours, and I knew it as well as you did from the word Go. Did you try those pills I gave you last night?"

"It isn't the time to talk of patent medicines, Captain McTurk."

"Just as you please. I was only trying to

shift the talk back to a subject that has amused you all the way from New York to the China Sea here. My dear Mosenthal, how was I to guess that your liver—Six points starboard, quartermaster—your liver had ceased to interest you?"

"Oh, if only I could be sure I should have the chance of living on, with a worse liver than even a Strasbourg goose carries, I'd be thankful. Great Law! There's another torpedo boat."

"Destroyer, by the loom of her. This fog magnifies—which reminds me that I must look about eight feet long, and that's too tall for a Jap." Commander McTurk drew an empty box to him and squatted down behind the rime-covered weather-cloth—"If only I could make some guess at which way they're steering, it would be easier. This is a regular quadrille. I suppose we must be navigating through a mine-field."

"A mine-field!" groaned Mosenthal.

"It is a very pretty evolution, taking a mixed squadron of cruisers and torpedo boats and destroyers and transports, yes, especially transports, through a mine-field, in a fog like a blanket. I know we'd be quite pleased at doing it in our own Navy. And these Japanese are pulling off the manœuvre without a hitch."

"But how do you know there's no hitch? You can't see a yard."

"You hear hitches, if you make them over a mine-field," McTurk suggested grimly. "Steady, as she goes, quartermaster."

Now, there is no getting over the fact that the s.s. *Paisley* was at that moment in an extremely

tight place, and no one realised the fact more thoroughly than that extremely cool and cheerful person John Kelly McTurk. She was carrying a cargo mainly made up of picric acid from the McMechie Explosive Company's works on the Hudson, to Port Arthur in China. Incidentally there was the Japanese steam blockade to be run, and it was frankly this that had lured Commander McTurk to accept the employment.

He had been dining one night at Mr. Israel McMechie's house in Newport, when the question of the effectiveness of a modern high-speed steam blockade was brought up by the host with a good deal of insistence. "Man," said McMechie, with the broadest of Border accents, "I'll gie ye balloons and submarines if that'll tickle ye, but I'll no think it possible for any vessel that swims on the sairface to slip between the steam sentries those Japanese have posted ootside Porrt Arthur." And to that text he stuck till the ladies went off to the drawing-room, and the port went round with a sigh of freedom. Mr. McMechie always forced the circulation of the port, to disprove the rumour that in earlier days he had been Mr. Israel Moses, a Hebrew of New York City.

"There was a Miss Drummond," said McTurk —"I wasn't introduced to her, but I heard her name, and she sat down at the other end of the table there—she seemed very keen on this blockade business. How's she interested, McMechie?"

"Merely sentimentally. Got no money in it. Helen Drummond was what you Americans call 'raised' in Japan, and therefore naturally she sides

with the Japs. She agrees with me that it is impossible to break through the blockade."

"And, of course," said McTurk, with genial sarcasm, "as you are both technical experts, and in a position to judge, your opinions are of great value."

"Man," said McMechie, "is not the whole subject a *terra incognita*? Now ye're an ex-Navy officer yersel!"

"I am an officer of the United States Navy," said McTurk with quiet dignity, "and if I do happen to be on the Retired List, I am none the less a member of the Service, and look forward to active employment again."

"Sairtainly, sairtainly; you must excuse a layman for treading on your professional susceptibeelities. But what I wished to say was this: The conditions of this blockade are new; the effectiveness of the blockade is unproved; no one can estimate its value with accuracy. But, still, I say it is effective."

"I should like to bet you're wrong."

"My boy, then you're in earnest, and I'll take the bet." McMechie was beginning to get excited and to wave the sternly repressed palm. Moreover, his borrowed Scotch was being overridden by an accent more native to him. "Do you think it is a thubject of professional interest?"

"Oh, it's all that." Commander McTurk saw himself handing to the Secretary of the Navy Board at Washington a private report on the Value of a Modern High-Speed Steam Blockade, by One Who Has Tested It. He smacked his lips over the luscious prospect, and reached for

the port. "Oh, it's chockfull of professional interest. But one can't bring off an experiment without materials, and who's going to provide me with a ship and cargo—a cargo, mind you, that's to be ordered by Russia for prompt delivery at Port Arthur?"

"Wait a thecond, my boy. Now, thuppothing you were offered command of thuch a boat, would you go?" It took Mr. McMechie both palms in active vibration to illustrate this proposition.

Commander McTurk was stung with a sudden spasm of caution. He glanced round the dinner table. All the men were listening. "Don't you think we might drop the discussion now?" he suggested pointedly.

"Oh, what's thaid here won't go further," the host protested. "The question is, are you going to back up your words? If you were offered a command, as a United States naval officer, would you try to run the Port Arthur blockade?"

"Great Glory! I should think I would."

"Then, my boy, I'll thee that you shall have the job offered before this time to-morrow. And I'll bet you now $5000 that you don't deliver your cargo."

"Done," said Commander McTurk.

But it seemed that the other men considered themselves under no vow of secrecy. Before he had been in the drawing-room five minutes a little dark-haired girl came up and said: "I've heard of your bet, Captain McTurk. My name's Helen Drummond, and I want you to know right here that, if you mean to try and carry this

blockade-running through, I shall do all within my power to have you stopped or captured."

McTurk stared down at her. "At any rate, let me thank you for your frankness," he said.

"I can't understand how an American officer can bear to wrong the Japanese in this way."

"I think you misunderstand the proposition. It arose merely out of an academic discussion as to the value of the present blockade. If you'll believe me, Miss Drummond, I can assure you I'd every bit as soon run a Japanese cargo through a Russian blockading fleet; and I feel sure," he added, with a bow, "I should then have a far surer prospect of success."

Helen Drummond bit her lip. "I suppose you know what your cargo will be?"

"Not a bit; and, to tell the truth, that is a matter of supreme indifference to me."

"Mr. McMechie runs a chemical works where they make explosives. He has got an order from Russia, and the one condition is delivery at Port Arthur. He hasn't seen his way to get the stuff there before. Now he's got you to do it for him. That's all."

McTurk's red clean-shaven face deepened a trifle in tint, and the thousand tiny wrinkles with which it was marked seemed to increase slightly in number. But he did not openly blame McMechie. He said: "I'm afraid, Miss Drummond, when we look at the matter from a business point of view, he's acted very naturally. And for myself, I am suited. I see a very interesting professional problem to work out. Mr. McMechie offers me the means; and I snap at the

chance, without inquiring why it was given. I should do exactly the same again. Any other officer in my position would."

"You are on the Retired List, I believe?"

"Yes," said McTurk, stiffly, "I am. I hope the data I shall bring back from this trip will be sufficiently valuable to get me another active command."

The girl looked at him with a brightened eye. "You are very determined," she said. "But please take note that I am determined also. I am for Japan."

"I am an American myself."

"And I also am an American. But one can love another country without losing one's nationality. I give you fair warning, Captain McTurk, that I consider this blockade-running scheme very wrong, and as you seem determined to go on with it, I shall use every means in my power to upset you. I am sorry to threaten a fellow-countryman, but you force me to do it."

"You have a perfect right to do as you wish on the matter. Indeed, Miss Drummond, I honour you very much for backing your own side so sturdily."

"Well," said the girl, "on that understanding we will part." She bowed coldly, and went to the other side of the room.

She had a very small opinion of the capabilities of this tall, thin man with the very accurate evening dress and the rather absurd flaxen wig: indeed, she remembered some rumours that professionally he was under a cloud, for having on some occasion or other "exceeded instruc-

tions"; but by way of adding her mite of contribution to the defenders of Japan, she intended to leave no stone unturned which would upset him and the scheming Mr. Israel McMechie.

Now, to Miss Drummond's threats Commander McTurk paid only the slightest regard, but Miss Drummond herself hung in his memory. There was a curve of her figure, a brightness in her eye, and a colour in her cheek that fascinated him; and what with an indiscreet allusion or two of his own, and the malicious report of friends, his excellent and elderly sister, Miss Bridget McTurk, heard enough about the matter to write him thereon several stinging letters of reprimand. To Miss Bridget, John Kelly McTurk was always in danger of being snapped up by designing females.

Out amongst the cold, dank fog billows, however, of the Yellow Sea, Bridget and her cautions were forgotten, but Miss Drummond and her threats held to the memory. Even Mosenthal had heard of them.

"That girl McMechie spoke about," said Mosenthal, "would be pleased if she could see us shivering here."

"I'm not shivering," said Commander McTurk. "The game's too interesting to leave time for shivers." He rubbed away an inch of fog-rime from an awning stanchion with his finger. "The question that's interesting me now is, do the Japanese number their transports? We do, the Britishers do, other people do; they label them on the broadside in white numerals nine feet

high. But this packet, naturally enough, has no number."

"Oh," said Mosenthal, with a fresh agony of fright, "here's another danger!"

"Quite so," said McTurk cheerfully; "I expect there are a good score of other little trifles like that which you haven't tumbled to yet. You see, that's where I come in. I'm a technical man. I see and appreciate all the small niceties. But we mustn't grumble. We've blundered into their line, luckily enough."

"'Lucky,' do you call it?"

"Most certainly. If we'd come along through here on our own, Mr. Mosenthal, we should have steamed into some floating mine or other, and gone up, *bang!* in a kind of thin small rain among the clouds. As I say, we've blundered into their line, and they've very kindly mistaken us for one of their own transports. But we can't expect them to keep the blunder going too long." He searched the fog again on every side with eye and ear. "I guess I'll start to edge away to starboard right now, without further waiting." And once more he gave a new course to the quartermaster.

Ahead, astern, and on either beam, the syrens of invisible ships barked and boomed their courses, their speeds, and a score of other particulars; and now and again the dry cough of a signal gun punctuated the sentences. Commander McTurk took many mental notes on the perfection of the Japanese sound signals for his forthcoming report to the Navy Board at Washington, and tried meanwhile to make a working translation of them for current use.

Twice hurrying torpedo boats sighted them, but slid on into the fog without interfering; and once they came upon a great carbide of calcium light flaring on the water. That was evidently some signal of importance. But McTurk had no clue to the tidings it carried, and steamed on past it with a frown. "I hate," he said, "to take risks that are marked out by signposts, but I can't read Japanese, and that's a fact."

"Where are we?" Mosenthal asked.

"In the Yellow Sea. But if you ask me exactly where, I will give up the puzzle as a bit beyond me. You must remember we've seen neither sun, stars, nor moon for three days; and though dead reckoning's all very well if you've been keeping a moderately straight course, there's no man living who could have gone through the last ten hours' blind man's buff and kept touch of all the bearings and all the distances run. The thing that's worrying me is, that I know we must be somewhere near the Sinclairs. Now, those islands are all steep-to, and the lead's no good; and the next thing is, I'll be piling her up on them, if I don't take a heap of care."

"Then bring-to here."

"And have those intelligent Japs sailing in on the top of me again. No, sir, we've wriggled through them once, but we'll not manage it a second time. Look at the fog: you see it threatens to clear now. Picture to yourself the fog lifting for a moment when one of their destroyers sighted us. Why, those nippy little chaps would loose off a Whitehead amongst the groceries we have in the hold before you could

wink. By Glory! though," he added, "I'd like to see their faces when they found that instead of a rice-tramp they'd touched off a cargo of picric. Why, we'd shake the fleet!"

Mr. Mosenthal's reply to the last suggestion was to collapse in a dead faint, and presently McTurk had the upper bridge to himself. Cautiously, very cautiously, he crept along, with two leadsmen actively employed, gradually shifting his course till he had the noises of the invisible fleet growing dimmer and more dim over his starboard quarter.

Now, he had not told Mr. Mosenthal—he had not breathed the fact to a single soul aboard—but he had a certain very private agreement with Mr. McMechie in case he came in for a check like the present one. He was to rendezvous at a certain spot in the Sinclair Islands, and probably would there receive further instructions. The Russians needed the cargo of picric very badly; were prepared to do much towards getting it; and arranged, if the cargo could not be run otherwise, that they would make a fleet sortie on a certain given date, during which the *Paisley* might make her dash for the harbour. Time, date, and details were to be carried across to the rendezvous at the Sinclairs.

That night the fog lifted for half an hour, and Commander McTurk got a stellar observation and went on his passage rejoicing. By daybreak he had groped his way through the fog to the rendezvous, and came to an anchor, feeling very pleased with himself for having done a very smart piece of navigation.

Land was invisible from the deck, and Commander McTurk was unused to climbing; but the occasion was unusual, so he put dignity in his pocket and prepared to spoil a uniform. He climbed to the spider band on the foremast, and there in the clear air saw the head of his mainmast, and the sterile peaks of the land beyond sticking up like nunataks from a Greenland ice cap—the ice, of course, being represented by the stainless fog. He hung there for a minute, taken up by sheer admiration. "By Glory," he muttered, "if I'd a few tubes of oil colour and a palette knife and a three feet by two canvas, I believe I could paint something just now that would be wanted even by the Paris Salon. However," he added with a sigh, "one's profession has to come first."

He had a compass with him; and after he had picked up some leading marks and checked his bearings, he was still more pleased at the fine accuracy with which he had groped his way into a very difficult harbour.

He had got back on to the ratlins, and was making his way down to deck, when of a sudden he was within an ace of being pitched out of the shrouds: the steamer's bow curtsied in the water; her stern with the quickness of a conjuring trick was being hoisted in the air; and presently there came to his ear the sharp rap of an unmistakable gun-cotton detonation.

He waited for half an instant with shut eye for the roaring explosion of the picric in the cargo, which he felt must inevitably follow, and then, as it did not come (though from what cause

he did not wait to inquire) he dropped down on deck.

Commander McTurk was a man used to emergencies, and he had not wasted time. He had pulled out a revolver, and was racing aft before the *Paisley's* stern had settled back to her normal draught again, and had shouted to his mate to go to the foredeck and heave up, in case it should be necessary to put the steamer on the beach.

As he ran, he looked over the side, but could see little. The fog still squirmed like uneasy rolls of cotton wool over the water, and it was only here and there that the outlines of the yellow wavelets came to view. Since the explosion, too, there had been silence. His crew, after the first yells of surprise and despair, had kept silence, listening with cocked ears for what was to come next; and of the torpedo boat that had fired on them—they all concluded that it must be a torpedo boat—they could neither see anything, nor could they catch so much as the whistle of escaping steam.

McTurk ran up the poop ladder and leaned over the quarter-rail. The acrid smell of the explosive hung in the heavy air and made him cough and spit, but though the cold icy fog might and probably did hold further menace, no straining of eyes showed any possible enemy.

Then like a flash McTurk saw what had happened. Through a little clearing of the fog a woman appeared on the water, paddling feebly. He recognised her face, and jumped on to the rail. He was a man who hated theatrical display, and he looked round to see if there was any one

else whom he could order overboard to do a rescue. No; the after-decks were very naturally deserted. So he bawled for a line to be thrown, and jumped himself.

The chill of the water took his breath away, but though he choked and gasped, he swam on with iron determination. He grabbed the woman a yard below the surface, pulled her up, drew her face over his shoulder, and started back with chattering teeth and shuddering limbs to the *Paisley's* rusty flank. A couple of lines with powerful fists at the upper end quickly scraped them up the wall of iron plating, and drew them on board.

"By crumbs, sir," cried his second mate, "but that was a plucky thing, if you'll allow me to say so."

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Cliffe—a simple case of being able to swim. Besides, I was the only man handy, and I couldn't leave Miss Drummond to drown."

"Oh, what's that? The lady a friend of yours, sir? Was she on the torpedo boat that smashed us?"

"I should say she was the torpedo boat from the looks of it," said McTurk rather bitterly, "and a pretty effective one too. Our propeller's somewhere on the sea floor, and the stern-post and rudder are twisted up like one of those prize wire puzzles. I guess we'll have to take the *Paisley* in to Port Arthur under sail: steam her we certainly can't."

"But I don't quite see. Unless Miss Drummond is a mermaid, how the crumbs could she

arrive here of all places without—let's see—well, visible means of support?"

"Oh, there's a sampan of sorts floating just a-wash away astern there; I knocked into it. She must have come off on the sampan, and had it swamped by the explosion. There'd be a wave, you know."

"Yes, there'd be a wave, fast enough," said Cliffe. "What's troubling me is how the lady happened to be there to blow us up so neat and punctual."

"I'd give two dollars and a half," said Commander McTurk, with some dryness, "to know it myself. I must say Miss Drummond gave me fair warning that she'd upset the trip if she could; but I never thought she'd be as good as her word, and certainly never guessed that she'd pay a call here in the Sinclairs, of all the desolate God-forsaken places, and with a private torpedo in her pocket. I'm free to own, Mr. Cliffe, if you like, that she's been too many for me so far; but we've got that picric still safe and under hatches, and you may take it from me that it's going in to Port Arthur, just the same as if the old *Paisley* had never been hit."

"But how, sir?"

"Ah! now you're asking me what I can't tell. Just be kind enough to think out a good plan yourself, Mr. Cliffe. Anyway, as we can do nothing for the present, I'll go below and change. I look like an out-of-work fireman."

In the meantime Miss Helen Drummond was being tended by stewards and hot blankets, assisted or retarded, as the case may be, by a special

bottle of patent medicine from the Commander's own private sea-stock; and pending her return to consciousness, McTurk reviewed the situation.

The question which particularly worried him was, How had the girl got to know of the rendezvous? He hadn't told her himself, and of the others in the know the choice seemed to lie between Mr. Israel McMechie and the Russians. It would be black treachery on McMechie's part to let out the secret, but then that Scottish-American Israelite was not above suspicion. There was money in it. From an owner's point of view the s.s. *Paisley* was an ideal blockade runner. She was old, she was fairly fast, she had an extravagant coal consumption, and she was heavily insured. If she got through, well and good; she was there for another day, and with her net cost well written down out of exorbitant profits. If she did not get through, well, there are some very solid consolations to be drawn out of Lloyds.

The other alternative was Russia. Commander McTurk knew the Russians and their ways pretty thoroughly, and he could appraise the Muscovite oath to a nicety. He was quite aware that if it suited their policy, the Russians would have sold him without a qualm. But he failed to see a single reason why the Russians should have given away their own secret to Miss Drummond in this particular instance, and therefore he crossed them off the list also.

Remained then the evidence he might extract from the lady herself, and he awaited her convalescence with a good deal of impatience.

It was not till evening that she was able to receive him, and she did so with a pretty show of gratitude.

"I wish to thank you," she said, "for nothing more or less than saving my life, at a time when by all the laws of war you ought to have let me drown as a dangerous enemy."

"All is fair in love and war," McTurk reminded her gallantly. "You know how I admired your outspokenness at Newport, so I've a perfect right to send you a bottle of patent medicine if I like. The stuff you were given is the finest mixture on earth for apparently drowned people, and if those woollen-brained humane societies could be got to believe it, and prescribe my cure instead of their own absurd gymnastics, they'd save five thousand four hundred lives a year."

"Your medicine certainly choked me up into life again, but I was not referring to that."

"Quite so," said McTurk, and slipped up a nervous hand to adjust his fresh wig, which he felt had slipped the least bit awry. "Now will you be very kind and drop recent history, and tell me what happened a little further back? I badly want to know how you found out I was coming to these chilly Sinclairs."

"Oh, it was the easiest thing in the world. You know you said I couldn't, when I told you that I'd spoil your expedition?"

"Did I?"

"Well, you laughed when I said I would, and that was the same thing. So I had all the Japanese blockading fleet and all their transports looking out for you in the first place."

"Yes, that's understandable. I danced quadrilles with them in the fog. But why turn up at these desolate islands yourself, Miss Drummond? They are not a health resort at this time of year."

"I came to meet you. I'd got evidence that you'd come here, and I tried to make the Japanese Admiralty act upon that evidence, but they wouldn't."

"They trusted in their blockading fleet, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid they thought that when I spoke of the Sinclair Islands I'd got hold of a fairy story, and that made me rather mad."

"And so you came yourself, and risked your life for Japan?"

"I'm afraid I risked your life. It's very touchy work blowing the propeller off a ship that's loaded with picric."

"H'm!" said McTurk, "I think you ought to have left this job to some man. It's hardly ladies' work."

"That's exactly what Miss Bridget McTurk said," the girl flashed out with a laugh. "By the way, I carry a letter from her to you, which I can guess will warn you very seriously against me and all my wiles."

McTurk laughed rather vexedly. "If you've been getting at Bridget, I can guess most of what she said. But I'll bet two dollars and a half that you didn't find out about the Sinclairs from her."

"Frankly, I did cultivate your sister's acquaintance, in the first instance, to see if I could pump her about the expedition. Equally frankly I may

say she told me nothing about it. She disapproved of me and of all young women who take to politics with much heartiness, and she hadn't the least qualm in telling me so."

At which they both laughed.

"And may I ask what the *Paisley* is going to do next?"

"Just wait here till the Russians send to bring her cargo off," said McTurk easily. "They'll fix that right enough when I tell them at the rendezvous what's happened."

"Ah, well," said the girl composedly, "I suppose I've had all my trouble for nothing. Here's your sister's letter."

But Commander McTurk chuckled as he went back to the chart-house. "I guess the fair Helen has told me in that last sentence what I want to know. There's no Russian messenger here to depend upon. Either she or her friends have bottled him, and here on the Sinclairs I've got no help to look for whatever! Well, I don't like a game any the less for having to play it off my own club. By Glory! She's a plucky girl, to come out here on her own and blow me up. I'd give two dollars and a half, though, if I could find out who's split."

The next morning at breakfast Commander McTurk was showing to a very interested Miss Drummond some egg-drills, a couple of blowpipes, and an elaborate nesting-stick, and explained to her his intention of going over the rocks ashore to try and add to his collection. "I saw Leach's fork-tailed petrel last night, and it should be nesting there. I went after that petrel

once at St. Kilda, and was too late, and I badly want to get a clutch in my cabinet. And then I saw a couple of hawk birds of sorts, out by that saddle-backed crag, that are very likely nesting also, and I guess they'll do with investigating."

Miss Drummond looked at him doubtfully. "Is there any message I can give if anybody calls whilst you are away?"

"Oh yes: back for tea. Get the mate to whistle if it is anything important."

Miss Drummond's suspicions were partly lulled when Commander McTurk did return that night with a dozen white eggs of unfortunate fork-tailed petrels and a clutch of red-tailed sea-eagles, which were so hard from sitting that it took him all the rest of the evening to blow them. And all the next three days he wandered over the desolate island, bringing home eggs, which he blew unpleasantly, and afterwards wrote about at great length in notebooks. She was lulled into the thought that at any rate his oölogical enthusiasm was real. But there was a greater find in prospect. It was another eagle; but the nest was far down an unscalable cliff, and he would require ropes and men to lower him.

Forecastle Jack, cooped up at sea, is always glad of a run ashore; and, as a reply for a demand for three volunteers next morning, twenty men stepped out. McTurk very good-naturedly let them all come.

* * * *

It was after nightfall when the junk creaked into the anchorage, and brought up near the *Paisley*, and until the great parrels of her two

mat sails had squeaked down the masts, and the clumsy wooden-stocked anchor had plumped into the yellow wavelets of the bay, and Commander McTurk's unmistakable voice had hailed the steamer to send a boat, neither Miss Drummond nor those of his own crew who had been left behind had any hint of what was happening.

Even by McTurk's own explanation, which was given in scraps whilst the hands worked with furious haste at transhipping the picric, the seizure had been very little short of a piracy. Obviously, too, there had been a fight, for three of his own men and at least a dozen of the Chinese carried wounds, and there was certainly one *Paisley* coal-trimmer missing. But Commander McTurk's explanations only went as far as he saw fit, and no one, after a glance at his face, felt inclined to press him. The man had altered: he was stiff, formal, and very much uniformed; he was taller than ever; he was a very figure of unapproachableness. Out of the genial egg collector, ready to put his hand to anything, there had been suddenly hatched the precise naval officer, who prided himself on being lonely and a martinet.

Nor was this quality one which appealed to the Anglo-Saxons on the *Paisley* alone: the junk's Chinamen made their kow-tows to him, and gave him the title of Tikong (*vice* the late skipper deposed); and when he brought on board a Thompson's compass to replace the primitive native instrument, they made offerings to it of pork, rice, and tea, with lavish piety. Certainly, when it was intimated to them that the junk

would voyage presently to Port Arthur, the expression of their faces showed the minimum of enthusiasm; but Commander McTurk reminded the doubters with stiff formality that he was "Number One topside Tikong"; and on further inquiry as to whether any one had still hesitation as to whether he could apply himself to duty, he was met by a prompt chorus of "Can do."

Still, for all that, a couple of hands surreptitiously slipped overboard and furbished up the great eyes which were painted on the bows of the junk, so that she might see her own way more clearly through the inevitable difficulties which were to come.

Junk-sailing is an art not often comprehended by the foreign devil; but McTurk had been on the China station before, and had acquired its intricacies through sheer love of his profession. So once the cases of picric were safely stowed amongst the massive timbers of the hold, he bade his hands up-anchor and make sail. A very white-faced Miss Drummond faced him as he prepared to leave the *Paisley* for the last time.

"I have received your order, Captain, through the steward, but I do not see my way to come with you to Port Arthur. I prefer to stay here on the steamer."

"You reminded me once," said McTurk curtly, "that all was fair in—er—war. I know you understand that this game is being played in deadly earnest, and—well, you are too clever for me to leave you behind near the Sinclairs. I am quite sure you will not make me use coercion."

"Very good," said the girl; "I will come with

you. Oh, but if I'd only known that your egg-hunting was all a fraud!"

The thousand tiny wrinkles of Commander McTurk's severe red face relaxed for a moment into a laugh. "You're quite wrong. I really am an enthusiastic collector. But you see I don't let even egg-collecting stand in the way of my profession."

She was a fine craft in her way, this junk that carried McTurk and his contraband across the chilly Yellow Sea. She was teak-built, three-masted, round-bottomed, and of the fashion known by Chinamen in the days when the Phœnician traded in Eastern Asia, and which endures placidly on till to-day. On a wind—if the wind was heavy enough—she could do her nine knots; except through gunshots or rocks she was practically unsinkable; and she rolled less than any other type of craft afloat. With her rudder lowered as far as the three windlasses could pay out the cane-rope, and her draught was then some twenty feet, it took fifteen men to handle the great tiller in a breeze; and hoisting the mat mainsail, even with the capstan, was a job for the whole crew of forty. One could not call her a handy craft, but she looked eminently apart from anything so modern as picric acid, and anyway, she was an improvement on the helpless *Paisley*. So Commander McTurk walked the ample poop with satisfaction, and once more was tempted to think out the heads of the report which he intended to send to the Navy Board at Washington, on the value of a Modern High-Speed Steam Blockade.

The Yellow Sea, as they sailed over it, was by no means desolate. A cruiser they saw, four-funnelled and burning cheap coal, before they had dropped the Sinclairs; but she was chasing to the southward, and either did not see or ignored them. Half a dozen times hurrying torpedo boats came above the horizon, and though they would probably have overhauled a steamer, a mere clumsy junk was not worth spoiling a passage for.

To Mosenthal each fresh craft gave a fresh qualm. Mr. Mosenthal had been in a state of semi-collapse ever since his fainting-fit, but he had insisted on coming on the junk. "I am in charge of that picric," he said, with a feeble wave of his palm, "and I must accompany it to Sheol, or elsewhere."

"I think," said McTurk once, "that Mosenthal is the bravest man I know. He is a coward by constitution: he can't help that. But he's got a real good sense of duty. He's a certain job before him, and he's doing violence to his personal feelings carrying it through."

Once danger seemed very imminent. A Japanese second-class cruiser sighted them from a far horizon, changed course, and made directly towards the junk. But as she raced nearer there broke from the distance that sullen mutter which indicates heavy firing, a mutter which lulled and rose with the fluctuations of battle. The cruiser heard it: here was nobler game than junk hunting; and away she sailed, perhaps, who knows? to her end.

"By Glory!" muttered Commander McTurk,

as he peered after her through his glasses, "I'd give two dollars and a half—I mean I'd give three finger-nails—to see what she'll see within the next hundred minutes."

But as it turned out they were to mix quite as intimately with the great fight as was good for them. The wind held steady, and when he was just beyond sight of land McTurk hove to—or, to be more accurate, lowered his mat sails and let the vessel rock in the trough. With nightfall he got under way again, and the junk, with sandal-wood-smoke and incense reeking from her joss-house, lumbered on for the great fortress.

The night bit with cold, and the spray that came on board glazed the deck and the scanty rigging with a mask of black ice. Ever and again, in obedience to some canon of Chinese seamanship, a man would sling himself over the bows and clear away the ice sheathing from the junk's great painted eyes. And between-whiles, from out of the black night, there came from the vague outline of land the sullen mutter of artillery.

Then from one corner of the blackness a funnel flamed; and as though it were a signal, the sea awoke. Cones of searchlight wheeled and crossed. More funnels trickled with reckless fire. A hell of iron and nickel burst out from quick-firers and machine-guns.

"That," said Commander McTurk appreciatively, "is a destroyer action." And presently he added, "There are five boats line ahead inside, and they are firing 6-pounders, and are probably Russians. There are four boats line ahead on

the outside, and by the sound of them they are firing 12-pounders. That's just like the Japs, to see they have the best tools. Miss Drummond, I'll ask you to go below. Those destroyers are coming this way, and as they are all steaming about thirty knots they won't be long in getting here. Mr. Mosenthal is below already, and he will look after you."

"Well," said the girl, "as this vessel is not armour-plated, I don't see that I shall be any safer amongst the nice warm Chinese smells down there, than I am here in the fresh air on deck. I'm not afraid to look what may come, in the face."

"By Glory! though," McTurk cried, a couple of minutes later, "there'll be something coming our way anyhow. Look, they've just changed the course ten degrees starboard, all of them."

The two parallel lines, on which the opposing destroyers were now steering, led one on either side of the junk, and presently the five Russians whirled past her starboard beam, whilst the four Japanese, spouting flame, smoke, and metal, raged by to port.

A hailstorm of steel and nickel spat through and through the mat sails of the junk from either side, and one three-inch shell—and they never knew which side sent it—exploded in the great teak mainmast, and blew out a hole one could have driven a pig through; but by the improbable chance which travels so often with bullets, not a soul on board was hit; and the battle swept away astern of them, still raging on with demoniac violence.

Then from the black hills ahead more cones of

search-light jerked out, and navigation seemed an easy thing. "That's Golden Hill," said McTurk, dropping his glasses, "and there's Electric Hill, and the lighthouse must be just under the shoulder. Barring—well, barring circumstances—we should be in the fairway within thirty minutes now, if this breeze holds."

"Are the circumstances, mines?" the girl asked.

"Oh, I don't suppose we shall blunder into any of them. The luck's sure to hold now. By Glory, though, look there! That's a Russian torpedo boat, and she's heading straight for us. I bet two dollars and a half I make her tow us in.—Mr. Cliffe."

"Sir?"

"Got that private signal flag handy?"

The mate showed it.

"Well, hoist it in a ball, and stand by to break it out when I give the word."

The torpedo boat came on at full speed, with the bow wave sluicing her turtleback. Then she stopped, with reversed propellers, and came clumsily enough alongside. She hailed, first in Russian and then in some dialect of Chinese.

"French I can do for you," said the Tikong, "or plain United States. This packet is bound for Port Arthur with a consignment of picric acid, which left home in the s.s. *Paisley*."

"Who's her master?"

"I am. Name J. K. McTurk, Commander, United States Navy."

"United States that? Come, my man, what proof have you of all this?"

"Cliffe, break." The ball of bunting fluttered out into a flag.—"Maybe you'll know that private signal, sir?"

The torpedo-boat searchlight swung up on to it.

"Yes, that's all right. Well, pass me your line, and I'll give you a pluck in. You'll foul some of our mines if you try it alone."

So a hawser was passed, and down came the great mat sails, and the torpedo boat went ahead. They came up under Electric Hill, and the crew were set to man the two stern windlasses on the berth deck, and another windlass on the poop, to hoist the great rudder up level with the junk's bottom, lest it should foul the wrecks of the steamers with which the Japanese had tried to block the fairway.

And so they came into the harbour of Port Arthur. They passed the *Czarewitch* on the mud, with scum and water up to her poop-staff; they passed the *Retvisan* and the *Pobieda* with men hard at work building concrete walls inside the torpedoed plates; they passed other grim stripped warships that had still plenty of fight in them; and presently they were brought up to moorings in mid-harbour, because their cargo was too dangerous to permit them to remain in the neighbourhood of the Bund.

Then began a time of vast unpleasantness for all concerned. The Russian can be one of the most charming of men when he chooses, and also, when he chooses, he can be just as obnoxious. The Russians' nerves at Port Arthur were on edge just then with defeat, and their tempers were raw

accordingly. They treated Mosenthal in a way that made Commander McTurk's gorge rise. But Mosenthal was consistently servile through it all, and eminently businesslike. Mosenthal was called every filthy name under the sun, but he waved a palm, and came away with his receipts signed. Mosenthal was called a circumcised dog of a Jew, but he waved two palms and secured another order for Mr. McMechie's firm, and he moreover pocketed a cheque on Petersburg for payment in advance. After which Mr. Mosenthal said he wanted one night to see the sights of Port Arthur and get the taste of salt water out of his mouth, and then he would be very much at his friends' disposal, and only too glad to quit the beastly place for ever and ever.

If Commander McTurk had ever been inclined to be a Russophile, his treatment at Port Arthur would have cured him. He had run a cargo in through the blockade, and he was of no further use to them, and they treated him as though he had been a buccaneer. They chose to flatly disbelieve in his naval rank, and, to prevent his seeing too much ashore, he was turned over to one of the sunk men-of-war and billeted in a filthy forecastle. Much as he resented this treatment of himself, he was still less satisfied with the reception of Miss Drummond. The Russian officers were a lot more civil to her than he thought at all necessary. But he could not interfere, and at length it dawned upon him that there was distinct method in all her artless questioning. At least she would get her revenge in handing on all the information to her friends the Japanese.

Indeed, when all the two ships' companies had left the besieged town together and had separated, and McTurk and Miss Drummond were making their way to Newchwang, he made no secret of his allegiance. "I came out here," he said, "not caring twenty-five cents for either side. I wanted data for a professional subject, and I've got it. When my report gets in to the Navy Board you'll see they'll appoint me to a ship out of gratitude, straight off. But what I was going to say is this: I'm your convert. Helen, you've made me like the Japanese, and as you say you love them too, don't you think you could marry me, dear, and then we can keep on liking them together all our lives?"

"I'm afraid not. You're a dear good fellow, J. K., and I admire you no end, but I couldn't marry you. To tell you the truth—I'll whisper—Miss Bridget wouldn't like it. I'm sure she foresaw this, and warned you against me in that letter!"

Commander McTurk's red face deepened in tint. "Bridget's a confounded old cat sometimes. You needn't notice half what she says."

"And besides, there's another thing. You're a convert now, but I can never quite forgive you for all the harm you have done to Japan. You know you ran in that cargo of picric in spite of everything."

"I did. It was a point of professional honour to do so. But there my interest in it ended. Once the receipt had been signed, I didn't care what happened to it; and as a point of interesting fact, I should say the Russians in Port Arthur

are raging very considerably about that picric just at this very moment."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you see, we left there at nightfall, didn't we? And just an hour before dark that junk was scuttled. The thing was done delicately—auger-holes, you know—and the tin of the cases had been opened with a sardine knife; but she'd have the whole night before her to do her sinking in, and I'm afraid by morning all that picric acid will be floating as a weak solution all around the water of Port Arthur harbour."

"Oh, J. K., you duck, and did you do that for me?"

"I'm sorry; but, to be accurate, I didn't do it at all."

"Then who did scuttle her?"

"Poor old Mosenthal."

"Mr. Mosenthal, of all people! I should have thought he was—well, too nervous."

"He was brimful of nervousness, right enough; but he did the trick for all that, and I can tell you it took some pluck. Knouting to death would have been mild compared with what would have happened to him if he'd been caught."

"But then, why—why did he do it? He doesn't care for Japan."

"Not a continental. But, you see, he's a Jew."

"Ah, yes, a Jew."

"And a Russian."

"So he is. A Russian Jew."

"That, I suppose, is why McMechie sent him: knows the language and the country, and who to give cumshaw to, and all that. But look here,

Helen: bother Mosenthal. Are you going to marry me?"

She leaned forward in her furs, and flashed a look with her brown eyes that fairly dazzled him. But her answer had in it something of indefiniteness: "Ask Bridget, and, if you can get over her, I'll think about it. No, J. K., you're not to kiss me: at least, not more than once."

A little later he said: "There's just one other thing I want to make me the happiest man on earth. Tell me, dear, how you found out about that rendezvous in the Sinclairs."

She laughed at him mischievously. "I'll give it you for a wedding present," she promised. "I wonder whom Bridget will let you marry?"

Chapter III

THE WESTERN OCEAN PIRATE

Miss Bridget McTurk picked up the side of her front that hung down over her nose, and pinned it up into place. Then she took the other two hairpins out of her mouth, turned away from the glass and said, "Come in."

A tall thin red-faced man, with an obvious flaxen wig, stepped into the room and greeted her.

She placidly returned his kiss. "If I'd known it was you, J. K., you could have come right in. My hair had come off, that was all. But I couldn't tell it was you from your knock, and other people seem to think they ought to be shocked if you let them see you wear a transformation."

Commander John Kelly McTurk fidgeted. He was very sensitive about his own lack of hair, and rather ashamed of his elderly sister's.

She went complacently on. "I've heard all about these two last young damsels you've been sparking round. The hussies! I've written to them both, so if they cool off, you'll know why."

"Really, Bridget!" her brother rasped out, "I wish you wouldn't interfere. I'm quite old enough to manage my own affairs."

"You may think you are," said his sister drily, "but past history doesn't show it. You're a

bachelor now at forty-two, and so far as I can keep count you've proposed to forty-two different women and been accepted by about twenty-one of them."

"Suppose we drop this subject."

"It's a good thing to drop hot coals. Well, my poor lad, what I sent to you for was this. That yam-headed Navy Board at Washington don't see they've got any immediate use for you on the active list. They can sit down and sleep on if they know you are still 'Retired'."

"How have you found that out?"

Miss McTurk slid in the two other hairpins, and made her yellow front really secure. "Is that straight?" she asked.

"No, it isn't," said her brother; "it never is. Look in the glass!"

Miss McTurk peered at the mirror. "Oh, how you fuss! That's near enough. You'll stay dinner now you are here!"

"Come to the point, Bridget. Have you been writing to the Navy Board?"

"My dear J. K., of course I have. Do you think I'm ashamed of it? I don't mind them knowing I'm interested in my brother's career. I don't mind all the United States knowing."

Commander McTurk groaned, and his red face with its thousand tiny wrinkles deepened in tint to a fine plum colour. "You had better imagine my comments," he said.

"If you mean you want to reel out a lot of wicked shipboard swears, I shall do nothing of the kind. I wish you had accepted my invitation to come to lunch last Sunday. Our minister gave

us a most edifying sermon on swearing. He said that to think a swear got you as many bad marks in heaven as to say one, and that the use of such words as 'botheration,' or 'drat the thing,' if you threw in the proper emphasis, was just as bad as one of those remarks that they print with a straight line."

"Well," said her brother, "I hope you'll carry it on your conscience that you've just made me score up thirty-two bad marks."

Miss McTurk scratched her nose thoughtfully. "You always had a fearful tongue, boy. I think it must be that which originally made you take to the Navy as an opening. But you never had a notion of making the most of yourself or your efforts. You've always seemed to lack the business sense. You want somebody to run you as a going concern, and I'm the person that's going to do it.—I beg your pardon, what was that? John Kelly McTurk, look me in the face and kindly repeat what you said."

"It slipped out," said the sailor, "and it's your own fault. I wish to Glory you'd leave my profession alone, Bridget. I'm an officer of the United States Navy, and though I am on the Retired list for the moment, I wouldn't change that to be King of Siam."

Miss Bridget nodded her yellow head. "It's quite right you should be proud of it: I'm not quarrelling with that. But I want them to put more hustle into your promotion. I want to see you an admiral."

"So do I, Bridget, and you can take it from me that I shall be one if you don't step in and spoil

my chances. Petticoat influence, unless it is effective, plays the very mischief with the nerves of the Navy Board.—Well, good-bye. I must be going now."

"I wish you could have stayed to dinner.—Drat this transformation! it's loose again. Just hand me a couple of hairpins, J. K., there's a good boy. You'll find some right there, under the cruet.—Mind you come Sunday, and I'll take you to church."

Now, there was more in all this talk than might meet the eye on simple reading. Commander McTurk had a scheme on hand for his own professional advancement, which was, to say the least of it, perilous. He has preserved, as he thought, the utmost secrecy; but secrets, as he knew, are apt to leak out in many directions, and of necessity this secret was shared by many others already. That morning he had received a letter which had upset him considerably. It came from a friend in Washington, and contained a hint that all was not well with his interests at the Navy Board. Incidentally the writer managed to drag in the name of Miss Bridget McTurk.

"That blessed Bridget!" thought her brother, "she's got hold of this Western Ocean game, and she thinks it dangerous, and she's trying to head me off. I've stood her interference long enough, and I'm hanged if I don't stop it here and now." With which he called, and found, largely to his relief, that, whatever her petition had been about, it at any rate had nothing to do with the scheme on hand. Upon which he made his way to the

house of Mr. Israel McMechie, with a mind very pleasantly unloaded of that particular care.

Mr. McMechie kept his tall visitor waiting; and when at last he did arrive in the room, he showed a certain strain of manner that threatened to change into petulant hostility on short notice.

In private life, and at the social board, Mr. McMechie divorced himself as much as possible from the ancestral Moses, and adopted that very broad Lowland accent which can be found at its richest between the latitudes of Paisley and Carlisle. The fleshy predatory nose, and the black and yellow eye, remained of course always with him; but on these occasions he strongly repressed the waving palm and such other oriental habits as were his by heredity, and posed as the Scot of ancient lineage, resident within the United States through a natural taste for travel.

But to-day he made no disguise of any of his Semitic tendencies. He even expostulated with both palms before he began to speak.

"Oh, I see you're mad," admitted Commander McTurk, "and I know what it's about. I just had to tell Cameron, your yacht's master, the plain truth, and there's an end to it. Captain Cameron had got his suspicions; he was brimming with them; and, as he was not an idiot, I don't see how he could have been loaded with much else."

"But you promithed me there should be abtholutely nothing of the kind."

"Well, it was no fault of mine. It was that four-inch Krupp rifle that gave the hint."

"Why wath it opened? You promithed me

you would not touch the cathe till you were thafely out at thea."

"I didn't touch it, McMechie; and don't you use that tone to me. It's some of your own men who were at fault, and if you're mad about the bungle, I can tell you I'm madder. You've gone into the game for a joke, for a sensation. For me, well, my professional future is in the balance, to say the least of it, and incidentally of course my neck as well."

Mr. McMechie was the successful head of half a dozen businesses, and many were the unfortunate Gentiles who had cursed his hectoring manner; but he was a shrewd enough judge of men to know to a sentence how far he could go with anybody; and he judged that Commander McTurk was an officer who would use the toe of his boot upon him if sufficiently provoked. So the tone was changed.

"My boy, my dear boy, don't get mad with me, your betht friend. It was your thafety I wath thinking about, not my convenienth. My boy, do you think I should ever worry about my own convenienth when your welfare wath contherned?"

Commander McTurk did think so, certainly, but he accepted the olive branch.

"The cathe looked like a grand piano: I thaw it mythelf."

"Oh, it looked like a piano crate, right enough —though as a matter of taste I think your men overdid the number of stencils they put on: 'Fragile,' you know, 'Pianofabrik,' 'This side up,' and so on. But that's not the point. Cameron

would have signed for 'contents as stated on bill of lading' if he'd been given an ordinary chance. But the crane-man lifted her with a rotten sling, and the rope gave just as the case came down on the deck fenders. Just one corner was splintered off, and Captain Cameron clapped his eye to the hole. Natural he should, I guess. And then he had the sense to stuff a wad of newspaper into the gap, and stow the case below with the broken corner down hill, so that no others of the crew tumbled to the tune that piano could play."

"Still there's Cameron in the know, and he's a Scot. They're a very grathping race, the Scotch."

Commander McTurk's red face twitched slightly, and some score or so of its thousand tiny wrinkles deepened. But he refrained from saying the obvious. He merely remarked that Captain Cameron wanted an explanation of that four-inch cannon, and got one.

Mr. McMechie waved with agitation. "My boy, you have put both our neckth in a noothe. Cameron can hang us any moment he lik'th. I hate to be in any man'th power. It ith tho costly."

"I don't see you need be rattled. You've been in other people's power before and not been hurt. You've been in my power, for instance."

Mr. McMechie answered on the spur of the moment, and he accentuated his reply with a backward palm-thrust of contempt. "Oh, you! You are a mere thimpleton. You don't know how to blackmail.—I mean," he corrected, biting at the slip, "I mean, you are a United States

Naval Officer and a man of honour, and that's quite another thing. Oh, I quite rely on you, my boy. I never feel any uneathineth about you."

"Yes," rasped Commander McTurk, "I see how you look at the thing. It must be a relief to you, McMechie, to come across a gentleman every now and again in your business dealings. Takes off from the general strain, I mean. However, I don't think you need fear Captain Cameron. Whatever else that man may be, he's a sportsman. Besides, there should be no further leakage. We'll pull out into the river to-night, and have dropped the land by to-morrow's dawn. I came here really to fix up final arrangements with you. By Glory! McMechie, every officer of our Navy would envy me if he knew what's on ahead."

* * * * *

Now, in the Bahama group there are three hundred and sixty-five islands, besides reefs and sandbanks, and though all of these are neatly entered upon the chart, most of them ceased to be visited with any regularity when the wrecking business was spoiled by steam shipping taking the place of sail in the Gulf Stream. It was in a harbour of one of these uninhabited islets that the 1,500-ton, twin-screw, turbine-engined, S.Y. *Lufkihumma*, came to a quiet anchor, whilst her people changed her into the semblance of a torpedo gunboat.

Except for the four-inch Krupp rifle, a very ancient piece, which wore an early pattern in breech-blocks, and had all its rifling eaten away with rust, all her armament was sham. But there

was no doubt about its impressiveness. Commander McTurk was an artist as well as a seaman, and he saw to it that the yacht's disguise should be amazingly complete. She showed three funnels instead of her former one, and the two new arrivals could upon necessity emit genuine smoke. She had a military top cuddling round each of her two masts, each with a short military signalling yard crossed above it. The genuine gun was mounted forward in a barbette that no one could tell from steel; and the wooden quaker-gun that matched it on the after-deck looked from a hundred fathoms distance every bit as dangerous.

Four Maxims rammed their water jackets through the armour of the tops, and from behind adder-headed shields five 12-pounders grinned from each of the gunboat's sides; and, though properly these should have been below the water-line, a couple of vicious-looking torpedo tubes sprawled in full view upon her decks. Then with brushes of green-grey all bright work was eclipsed, and the whole of the vessel and all that she carried to public view was reduced to one inconspicuous, serviceable, fighting tint.

Now, it must not be at all understood that this work went on peacefully and without hitch. Yachtsmen are supposed to be the pick of all seafarers in neatness, obedience, and sailing skill; and the crew of the S.Y. *Lufkihumma* had all these qualities and many others. The yacht was chartered "for a three weeks' cruise" by a gentleman they had never heard of, and they were quite prepared to give him diligent service, and to put up with any peculiarities he might wear, in return

for their regular wage and a possible douceur at the end of the trip.

They bunkered, and took on board the usual stores; they received and stowed a number of crates and packing-cases without showing the smallest curiosity about their contents; and they put to sea without emotion and in the ordinary way. When they ran into the harbour of a desolate island, which seemed chiefly noteworthy as containing a derelict plantation of bastard sisal hemp, still they remained unmoved and uninterested. The destinations of yacht charterers are usually beyond the comprehensions of their deck hands and engine-room staff.

But when the very tall gentleman with the red face and the wig, who had been painting weird seascapes during the passage, put off tweeds and came on deck in the precise uniform of a Commander U.S.N., with telescope under arm in place of the binoculars he had been using before, why, then they woke up with the idea that here at last was something new. Cameron, their own skipper, alone of all the yacht's company, seemed to be in the know, for when this new, starched person curtly ordered "Call aft the crew," Captain Cameron saluted briskly and gave the formal "Aye, aye, sir," which is required by a superior. The men obeyed promptly, and with considerable wonder.

"Men," said Commander McTurk, "you will have seen the agitation that has been going on ashore about the need for strengthening the U.S. Navy, especially in commerce-destroying cruisers."

They evidently had not.

"In the papers, I mean."

No, they had not read the papers—at any rate those parts of the papers. The merchant seaman and the yachtsman reads the murders, and occasionally the agricultural news. He would as soon think of reading Latin Grammar as of tackling Naval topics.

"Well, I can see you haven't heard of it, so I am here to tell you. Our Navy needs cruisers which could turn a hand to commerce-destroying if war comes, and the Government won't buy them till there's a scare. So that's why we're here: to provide the scare. We shall guy the yacht out as a gunboat, with canvas funnels and canvas fittings and quaker guns, and proceed for the space of one week to hold up all shipping that tries to cross the Western Ocean."

"Oh, whiskers!" murmured a voice, "what a pile of loot!" and from half a dozen men an uneasy laugh went up. The rest stared at one another in awkward silence.

"Of course," said Commander McTurk, "we are not going pirating, or anything near it. This is merely a political move, as I tell you. But I'm not denying there's a certain small amount of risk attached to it, as some loose-lipped idiot may talk when he gets ashore and cause us to be stared at more than's pleasant. Well, any one that does not wish to volunteer, can step ashore here on this island, and improve his mind by growing sisal hemp. For those that care to report for duty, there's double pay, reckoned as from and to the seaboard of the United States."

"Beg pardon, sir," said one man: "will food and water be left for any one that's marooned?"

"Certainly—with limitations."

"And will the pay run on, sir?"

"The month's pay you signed on for, my lad."

"And will the ship call back for them that's marooned after she's through with her cruise?"

"Why, that I couldn't guarantee. Do you want to learn up how to grow sisal hemp?"

"Me, sir? Oh Lord, no! Nothing in my line. Besides, I wouldn't miss the other racket, not if we have to swing for it. My name's Kidd, sir, and I think I must have had a great-grandfather who was in the profession before me. No, sir, I've always hoped for a chance like this. I only talked just to point out to any of these ducks that seem a bit doubtful, sir, that they'd best chip in, or they'll have no chance of ever seeing sweet home again."

Commander McTurk frowned. There was a certain buccaneering freedom in the man's speech that, as a Naval Officer, he strongly resented. But still he made an effort, and swallowed his pride. After all, the expedition was a trifle too unorthodox to run on strictly naval lines.

"I take it, then," he rasped out, "you all understand what is proposed. Now, before I go any further, are there any objectors? If there are, let them stand out."

Now, it is quite a sure thing that most of the crew, in spite of the double wages offered, were by no means in love with the scheme; but where one man volunteers, it is always a very unpleasant matter for another to hold back; and besides,

there was the alternative of a residence of doubtful length upon the island. The word "marooned" had been used. The operation of marooning is supposed to be obsolete in this year of grace, except amongst the lighthearted curdlings of a boy's book. But somehow, just then, the bald mention of the word carried its thrill.

They cast their eyes upon the isle, these doubters, and saw there desolation, dished up under a glare of sun. The ruined sisal plants might have stood for inhospitality typified in vegetation. The old white coral buildings ached with ruin.

Then too there was Commander McTurk to be reckoned with. The affable gentleman with the box of colour-tubes and the palette knife and the easel, who had made such extraordinary presentments of sky and sea on the voyage out, had vanished. There was nothing affable about this tall, precise, naval officer: the man radiated authority; and he carried with him too a certain air of danger to those who might presume to thwart him that was very daunting. He had nothing of the fighting Yankee merchant officer about him; they were used to that breed, and so could judge with certainty. This one was dandified in clothing, and carried a little one-barrelled telescope tucked under his armpit, and his hands habitually clasped behind his back. They could almost be sure even that he had no such thing as a revolver about his person. He was something fresh and new to them, and perhaps for that reason amongst the others they were all frankly afraid of him. No, when it came to the point

there were no members of that crew who failed to volunteer.

"Well and good, then," said Commander McTurk. "Mr. Cameron, please turn-to and get the quaker outfit rigged, according to the schedule I supplied you with."

Paint and the sea are wonderful softeners of the crudities of canvas and wood, and at a hundred and fifty yards distance no one even with glasses could have made out that the S.Y. *Lufkihumma's* defences and armament were of anything but steel. And, by the way, her name, of course, had disappeared from bow, elliptical stern, boats, steam launch, and even from the carbide life-buoy by the poop-staff. Instead, there flared a great number **17**. Vaguely that new name seemed to hint that at any rate there were sixteen others in the fleet of which this mysterious war-vessel formed a unit.

Only one touch of sentiment crept into the whole outfitting, and that was when the ensign was hoisted—a great splash of red, with broad white bars—under which they were to do their work. Commander McTurk called aft his whole crew. "Men," he said, "I swore never to fight under any flag but Old Glory, and——well, we are not going to fight. I never thought even to sail under another flag, but I'm going to do it now just because I know that, although we are working for the good of the United States, diplomacy commands that we keep our commission hidden. That's all. Pipe down."

In the forecastle, over his tea, the sailor Kidd grinned round at his messmates. "Did you twig

the old man's tomato face when we hoisted that new rag? It went as near white as I guess it could get. I almost looked to see him shed the hero's tear when he sobbed out that about Old Glory. I believe he was very nearly mad enough to have thrown down his wig on deck and danced on it."

"'Twouldn't be real healthy to tell him that," commented another. "There's a bit too much of the I-can-call-down-lightning-by-pressing-a-button kind of look about the pirate king, to encourage a humorist."

"Thing that strikes me as funny is that he thinks we're going pirating and not touch any loot. Well, I reckon I'm like the original Captain Kidd when it comes to loot. Once we board one of these Western Ocean liners, if I don't come back to the ship with a pocketful of diamond rings and scarfpins, you may call me a Dutchman."

One final preparation they made at that Bahama islet before they sailed. Spars and wire ropes were taken ashore, and presently, from the crest of the isle, a great mast arose, guyed against every wind of heaven, and festooned with mysterious wires. Two of the ruined buildings of the sisal farmer were roofed with corrugated plates; and presently from one of them there came the hacking cough and the evil breath of an oil engine, and with these was mingled the satisfied purr of a complacent dynamo.

In the next room a couple of electricians clamped down a great bench full of instruments; and when at last one of them pouched his square-

nosed pliers and said, "Thank Jemima, that's through," the other replied, "Well, I'll try and call up the United States."

He threw over a switch, and a great, blue-white flare blazed out with a noise like the splash of a leaden bullet on stone. "I bet that's making somebody's mirror rotate," said the operator, and lit a cigarette; and then presently—"Got 'im! Now, gents, for the latest news from the course."

* * * * *

The mail steamship *Cryptic* emitted such a buzz of sound, that from a quarter of a mile away one was forcibly reminded of an upturned beehive. Counting crew and passengers, she was carrying fourteen hundred and seventy-three souls when she left Queenstown, and she had engaged to bring these without halt or delay to a New York pier. Against all of the five thousand and one dangers of the Western Ocean she was armed as well as science and experience could protect her. But here had arrived the unexpected.

A warship, an unmistakable warship, had steamed up from the southward, had fired a blank gun, and had flown a string of signal flags which read "Heave-to or take the consequences."

As it happened, Captain Salemson of the *Cryptic* was himself at that moment on the upper bridge. He looked at the warship's ensign, which stood out flat as a board behind her. "Red with white bars? Who the pit are you to ask me to heave-to?—Hey, you there, Mr. Wilkins, keep your hand off that telegraph."

Thirty seconds later, with the signal still flying, the warship fired her bow gun again, and this

time a steel hint hopped and skipped through the wave crests. There was a stern big gun to match the one forward, and that was also trained on the *Cryptic*, as were also five broadside guns behind slanting shields, as well as two torpedo tubes and some Maxims. It crossed Captain Salemson's mind that there were probably also under-water torpedo tubes as well, and that he was personally responsible at that particular moment for fourteen hundred and seventy-three lives.

"Stop her, Mr. Wilkins, both engines," said the Captain to his subordinate at the telegraph; and added some further remarks that those passengers who knew him in the dining-saloon would never have guessed were within his compass.

"Wireless message, sir," reported another officer; and Captain Salemson took the paper.

"*From Commander Gunboat Seventeen stop*," it read. "*Cease all wireless communications except with me stop shall torpedo you if you attempt speak any one else message ends.*"

"Hell!" said Captain Salemson quietly. "Here, send this," he said, and wrote—"*Kindly state who you are.*"

Down in a darkened cabin below, the message spirted out in great blue lightning flashes, to the accompaniment of terrifying smacks; and in due time the reply came back through the ether:

"*From Commander Gunboat Seventeen stop I am your superior in force stop get under way at once on course South five degrees East or take consequences message ends.*"

Till that moment of his life, Captain Salemson had never quite realised how lonely a man is the

master of a great Atlantic liner. At table he is affable with passengers, on duty he is courteous with his officers, ashore he has his owners to rely upon; but at sea the whole responsibility for the great steamboat and all that is within her is his and his alone.

"By Gath! that's a pirate," mused Captain Salemson—"no less. This is the twentieth century, and that's a pirate, who could sink me in two minutes and a half, and I couldn't so much as chip his paint. My God! and an hour ago the Purser was congratulating me on a full passenger list and a heavy cargo!"

In despair he sent another message: "*What are your terms?*"

Back came the stern reply: "*From Commander Gunboat Seventeen stop obey instructions immediately or take consequences message ends.*"

Captain Salemson glared through his binoculars. Where this vessel had come from, there was nothing to show. She was of a class slightly different from any he had seen before; but then there is an infinite variety in warships; and anyway there was not the smallest doubt about this being a ship of war. Her naked defences, her businesslike colour, which blended so easily into the seascape, her wicked armament trained remorselessly on his boilers, all spoke to him eloquently of her power of offence, and of the *Cryptic's* utter helplessness.

A passenger, an English member of parliament who knew himself to be a most important man, brushed aside all underlings who would have stopped him, and made his way to the upper

bridge. "Captain," he said, "the passengers would like to know——"

But he got no further. On him Salemson turned like a tortured lion. "Get off my bridge. D'ye hear me? Get off my bridge, and go to your room. Quartermaster, take this man down to his room, and if he gives trouble, iron him.—Mr. Wilkins, half speed ahead, both engines. The course is South five degrees West.—By Gath! I'm going to keep discipline amongst my passengers, if I have to pull a gun on some of them."

Captain Salemson had made a variation of ten degrees in the course which was ordered him. He wished to see his persecutor at closer quarters. At a distance none of her people were in sight. Her commanding officer was probably in the conning tower, her gun crews behind their defences. If only he could see a face or two to recollect. If only he could get some hint of nationality. . . .

"Wireless message, sir."

Captain Salemson took the paper and swore as he read his order:

"*From Commander Gunboat Seventeen stop get on to your course immediately message ends.*"

Captain Salemson shifted his helm and steamed away into the South, receiving as he went further instructions for his future guidance. He was to manufacture a flag, red with white bars, and hoist this at the fore if he met with any of Number Seventeen's consorts, to show that he had been already dealt with. He was to report each half-hour the code word *Commerce* to show that he was accurately carrying out his instructions, and

failing this he would be very promptly overhauled and sunk.

One small piece of grim consolation did the Captain of the *Cryptic* have as he was steaming savagely out of sight. Hurrying from West to East, there came the *Aquaria* of the great rival British line. Her also he saw held up, even as he had been, and vividly could he picture the mortification of his old *Conway* mate, her skipper. "Mr. Wilkins," he said, "one blessing, ours isn't the only line in the soup, that's plain. I don't know how big his appetite is, but if that scathing pirate stays where he is till nightfall, he should snap up the Dutchman as well, and then none of the companies can crow."

Commander McTurk held up the *Fürst Moltke* about nine o'clock that night, and despite many threats of Imperial Mailed Fists and telegrams, sent her also remorselessly at right angles to her proper course, in a direction five degrees East of South. She carried instructions to repeat the code word *Fist* at intervals of thirty minutes, so as not to interfere with the other code words *Commerce* and *Canada* which every half-hour came out of the ether ahead of her.

With these great liners Commander McTurk had felt no nervousness. He knew that their captains would be far too much concerned about their passengers to take any of the chances opened up by resistance. With cargo boats he could not be so certain. "You see," he pointed out to Cameron, "our whole racket's three parts bluff and one part water, and if a man's only got himself, and a well-insured steamboat and a handful of old sailors to

consider, it's quite possible he'd conclude to see our hand. I know I would under the circumstances. And you know it won't do to shoot in earnest if they do refuse to stop."

"No," said Cameron. "That's the blame' exasperation of it. They're half mutinous forrard, now they find that they're pirates, as they say, and don't carry a full pirate's ticket. That sea lawyer Kidd wants them to seize the ship, I believe, and go in for the real thing."

Next afternoon they had their example of a resister. A rust-streaked tramp of some thousand tons climbed up over their horizon, and was duly hailed and bidden heave-to. A watch of three hands were engaged in painting her boats. On the upper bridge a ragged sailorman sawed at the wheel, and a spruce little officer with a red torpedo beard sat on an aerated-water box at the bridge end, smoking a long cigar and playing an accordion. Of the summons to stop he took no notice whatever.

Followed the usual shot, and the gunboat raced down to a hundred yards distance, and brought the tramp under her broadside battery. A voice through a megaphone repeated the summons to surrender, and offered sinking as an alternative.

The fierce little officer put down his instrument, spoke sharply down his engine-room voice-tube, and conferred with his steersman. The tramp's pace slackened, and her head fell gradually off, sawing over the swells till it began to point towards the gunboat.

"Who the pit are you, anyway?" inquired the red-bearded officer.

"You will hear in due time. In the meanwhile you are to consider yourself captured."

"Oh, am I? What's that pink table-cloth you've got hung out there with the white gate on it? Come out of those cardboard boxes and show yourselves. I want to see what kind of skunks you can be that think you're bosses of the Western Ocean. By James! don't you try to dictate to me!" He seized the telegraph handle and jammed it down again with a vicious whirr to "full speed ahead."

The engineer on watch had had his warning through the voice-tube, and promptly opened his throttle to the fullest. The little officer snapped an order at his wheelsman, which apparently was not carried out with that quickness he would have liked, for he sent him trundling with a sharp clip under the jaw, took the wheel himself and ground it over hard-a-starboard as far as it would go. The old rust-streaked tramp came round like a yacht, and her bow headed straight for the gunboat's side. Here at any rate was one skipper who was not afraid to ram.

"Good man," said McTurk, and ordered one of his own engines to go astern whilst the other turned ahead. His vessel twisted like an eel, escaped the collision, and raced ahead, and for a mile the tramp hung doggedly after her and then went back to her course. All through the little episode the three hands of the watch had continued to paint at her boats, as though little occurrences such as these were too common to give interest.

"By Glory!" said Commander McTurk, "I'd

give two dollars and a half to have that small red-bearded man under me for the next tough job I'm set to."

Captain Cameron laughed. "You'd find him a dear bargain, sir, even at that price. Either you'd have to kill him before you'd been together a week, or he'd kill you. He can only be one thing, and that's skipper."

"Oh, you know him then?"

"I should think I do. Kettle's his name. Look: he shot off that ear-lobe for me. We were . . . . Well, tell you that later. Look, sir, there's the Havre boat dead astern. She'll have her six hundred passengers. She'll be our weight."

For a whole week Commander McTurk held up the traffic on the Western Ocean, and proved conclusively to the United States the value of fast cruisers in war time as commerce destroyers—and incidentally, of course, proved exactly the same axiom to every other power on the globe which owned a ship and a fathom of seaboard.

At the end of that week an oil engine woke into sudden noise and odour amongst certain bastard sisal plants on a Bahama islet, and McTurk, on Gunboat **17**, saw the explanatory palms of Mr. Israel McMechie projected out to him across the hills and dales of ocean.

France had sent a cruiser out to the scene of the outrages; the German Emperor ordered one squadron of battleships to be commissioned forthwith, and another squadron to be built; the United States sent what cruisers could be spared. Great Britain alone had sent no ships: she happened, as usual, to have part of her Atlantic

squadron cruising about somewhere or other near the spot where it was wanted. Mr. McMechie seemed to have special dread of the policy of Great Britain.

The *Cryptic*, the *Fürst Moltke*, the *Aquaria*, and the other early captures had all made their way into port, and somehow it had leaked out that the whole thing was in some way or other a rather elaborate hoax, with a trifle of political flavouring thrown in. But that did not make some people any more amiable. The shipping companies, in particular, bawled for redress and vengeance. They had been forced into an undue expenditure of coal, provisions, interest, and wages, and the extra moneys they had earned from the liquor bills they quite forgot to mention. They cried loudly about the injury done to their passengers —which was hardly fair, seeing that the said passengers were provided with at least one topic which would not wear out for a life-time. And they talked about the unprotected state of the great trade routes in case of sudden forays—which, of course, had always been common news to everybody.

So with the exception of Germany, who wanted to cry a three-months' halt till her ships should be ready, the great powers interested quartered the seas with remarkable industry, and Commander McTurk got his warning only just in time.

Of course, the thing to be done was to shake the wizard's wand, and change back the gunboat, with its bristle of armament and its flaring **17**, into the trim *Lufkihumma*, with as little delay as

might be. But here Western Ocean weather stepped in most unkindly. For three days it blew a solid gale, and the yacht, fine sea-boat though she was, was hard put to it to keep afloat. Furthermore, her coal was running extremely short.

Unship the heavy Krupp gun on the foredeck they dare not in that rage of sea, lest it should take charge and stave in the decks; and perched up high as it was, it made her roll till they thought the masts would go overboard. They rid themselves piecemeal of the armoured tops, the two signal yards, the Maxims, the quaker broadside guns and their shields; and once the rounded wood and canvas sides of the conning-tower were cut adrift, there stood firmly in mid-deck, as formerly, a very comfortable chart-house. But the stern big gun still poked a lengthy wooden chase out of its armoured hood, and the tackle of the wireless telegraphy sang between the mast-trucks.

Now, on yachts, a wireless telegraphic installation is unusual, and on the other hand it would be widely known that Gunboat **17** (which was about the same size as the *Lufkihumma*) had one. But Commander McTurk decided to keep in wireless telegraphic touch with his base till the last suspicious touch was wiped away, and this could not be whilst the weather lasted. For, most damning of all touches, they carried along the paint with them—the paint that could not be repainted to an honest colour till something approaching a flat calm, or a harbour, gave a chance to rig stages over the side.

It was at this point, whilst the gale was still making hard Western Ocean weather, that H.B.M.S. *Panther* blew into sight; promptly saw Number **17**; and bore down upon her under close-reefed topsails and steam.

The signal "Heave-to: I want to speak to you," blew out from her lee rigging, and she called noisy attention to it with a blank cartridge.

The other vessel, which had been riding head to sea, acknowledged the summons by rounding away before the gale, steaming into the seas at the top of her pace, and firing up another boiler on her few remaining tons of coal. Commander McTurk pulled down his wig till it almost reached his nose, and bit his thumbs in fury at fate. Being disgraced in the United States he could stand: he had been working for the United States' good. Being swamped or sunk at sea—well, that was a sailor's legitimate end. But being caught by the lubberly old-fashioned *Panther*, and being patronised (as he was sure he would be) as a failure by her officers, was more than he could stomach under any considerations. And so he was prepared to do rather more than possible in making an escape.

The gale, as has been said, was heavy for the yacht, but, to all appearances, it was just the *Panther's* weather. Her plump bows lifted her over the seas like a duck, and her canvas steadied her so that she rode like a swing.

She was an ancient corvette, three-masted, barque-rigged, with ten knots of auxiliary steam, and had one degree more fighting value than a well-found Chinese junk. But she had a fine

assortment of obsolete muzzle-loading guns, and after she had hoisted her second signal of "Heave-to or take the consequences," she started hurling round shot with these, and making remarkably good practice considering the weather.

Commander McTurk's fighting blood got on the boil, and if the after gun instead of that on the foredeck had been the quaker, it is probable that the Western Ocean would have seen that afternoon a very deadly duel. But luckily the real gun was so mounted that it would only fire a few points on either bow, and although McTurk and Kidd (both separately) cursed the after-deck weapon with every hard word they knew, it was a stolid wooden thing, and did not mind. So the windy afternoon wore on, whilst both vessels just held their places; and then night fell.

With darkness, Cameron brought word about the coal.

"I've got my memory on it," said Commander McTurk; and half an hour later put up his helm and bore away with the sea abeam at right angles to his former course. The *Panther* was out of sight, and the *Panther* with her crew at quarters blew on before the wind, and so passes out of this tale. The *Panther* possessed nothing so modern as a search light, and on the morrow, *more maritimo*, her crew made lurid comment on this fact.

* * * * *

It was a fortnight after this that the S.Y. *Lufkihumma*, out of coal, but trim and debonair as shining brass and polished teak could make her, worked in under sail to Castle Harbour in

the Bermudas for bunkers and mail. She had been having a most enjoyable cruise in some vague seas round the Bahamas or the West Indies. Her people's accounts varied—but then yachtmen's navigation is notoriously weak, so no one in St. George's paid much heed to discrepancies. She had not been troubled by the Western Ocean pirate because she was too small, or too far south, or, probably, because there was no pirate. Whose leg was being pulled? Oh, the pirate was genuine, was he? Well, certainly the *Lufkihumma* had not been seized.

It was the extremely tall Commander John Kelly McTurk, U.S.N., who did the talking, and no one ever took him very seriously. A fellow-officer in the same service, who was getting rid of a Philippine malaria in the St. George Hotel, laughingly guaranteed this. And if Commander McTurk was a trifle absent-minded in some of his answers, and openly said it was because he was so deadly anxious to get his mail, the probable reason was (as the other officer explained with a wink) that he was, as usual, after some girl or other, and wanted to see if the coast was clear of the troublesome one, three back, who had been his best girl eighteen months ago. His fellow-officer discoursed most wittily in the hotel verandah on Wiggy McTurk's weakness in this direction, and the naval officers from the British ships on the station told lies to prove that they had more curious men in their own Service.

There was a remarkable absence of news from McMechie. Mr. McMechie, with racial caution,

was singularly anxious not to commit himself, and so, as the simplest way of doing this, had refrained from writing a solitary line. There was, however, a long and chatty letter from Miss Bridget McTurk, which unfortunately has only reached me in a very expurgated form.

The first three pages, for a wager, referred to some unfortunate love affair. Anyway they are missing. I quote from the top of page four.

"*So you may thank me for clearing you out of that entanglement at any rate. This seems all our news that concerns you, and so I sign myself as usual*

"*Your affec. Sister, Bridget McTurk.*

"*P.S. Your Scotch friend, Mr. I. McMechie—by the way, he comes from Judæa, and not even Paisley, certainly not Glasgow—Mr. McMechie has, they say, made a million on Wall Street over the late scare. He had the pluck to know that the whole thing was ridiculous, and sold when stocks flopped (as they did, let me tell you, J. K.,) and then bought in again when they touched the floor. Result* $1,000,000. *So much for a Hebrew's faith in U.S.*

"*P.S. No. 2. More about McMechie. He has bought a shipyard, and has secured the orders that the Navy Board have given out for three new cruisers, which they ordered owing to the late scare. He seems a useful man for you to know. Am writing to him this mail to bring your name before him.*

"*P.S. Many thanks for that bottle of patent medicine which you say you saw favourably mentioned in an advertisement. I have found it*

most warming. Please send another. Larger if they make them.

"I open again to say that idiot of a woman Sallie Hamilton has just called. She has got some idea in her head that you were somehow or the other mixed up in this pirate business. I showed her the above-mentioned bottle, with the wrapper, pointing out it was mailed by you from New York when the pirate was doing brisk business in mid Atlantic. That about cooked her goose. I don't really know, J. K., how you could have dangled after such a silly woman as Sallie. But my! she did get mad when I said so."

Commander McTurk's red face with its thousand tiny wrinkles twitched as he read. Bridget was really too exasperating at times. But Bridget often let solid information leak out in her postscripts.

"Now, I suppose," said Commander McTurk to himself, "that McMechie thinks he's made a catspaw of me; but to my idea the boot's on the other foot. The States wanted those cruisers: I've seen to it that we've got 'em. The means don't matter."

Chapter IV

THE BALANCE OF POWER

Of all Central American republics whose names have become a byeword for instability, roguery, and general undesirableness, that of Sacaronduca stands out in big block letters at the top of the black list. The actions of the others are frequently classed as suspicious; but those of the Government of Sacaronduca are always regarded as beyond suspicion: it is taken as an axiom that they are crooked.

Now, in the spring months of the year of grace 1904, the political state of Sacaronduca was more than usually unsavoury. All foreign debts have been repudiated; there were four armies wandering about the country, and fighting with one another for their own hands whenever they met; *pesta bubonica* had emptied Dolores, the capital; and the German Emperor, who had failed after many attempts to collect a just debt, was only restrained from seizing the Customs House of the port by the Munroe doctrine, and an inability to find a Customs House to seize.

The whole civilised world might have had these facts for the asking, and the only reason the world did not ask to be posted about the latest wrangle in Sacaronduca, was that it took

not the smallest interest in either the country or its peoples. Indeed, in Great Britain it has been calculated that quite seven million adults first heard of the existence of a place called Sacaronduca on that Monday morning when they read of the arrest of Commander John Kelly McTurk by the Tyneside water police.

Even then they were only faintly interested. But the news went under the North Atlantic to New York, and scare headlines flashed out all over the American press. "Arrest of a United States naval officer in England," ran the tidings. "Grave situation."

The accounts varied. Indeed, only the bare fact had been given to the press by the Newcastle-on-Tyne authorities, and it had been expanded according to taste in Newspaper Row. But after the first spasm of sensation in the United States, it gradually began to be mentioned that Commander McTurk was on the Retired List; that the Secretary of the Naval Board at Washington neither knew of his whereabouts, nor would accept any responsibility for his doings; and generally, that before war was declared on Great Britain for the insult, it would be better first to inquire as to exactly what Commander McTurk had done. Thereafter, in American newspaper circles, interest in the matter discreetly dwindled, though it was probable that authorities in three different departments at Washington kept thoroughly abreast of subsequent developments.

Now Great Britain—despite the whirring of the Atlantic cables—was not in the least impressed with the fact that Commander McTurk was an

officer of the United States Navy, retired or otherwise. They respected the United States Navy, but failed to see what it had to do with the case in point. Taken at his own valuation, "Captain" McTurk was in the employ of the Republic of Sacaronduca; and students of the large-scale atlases presently discovered this country among the more volcanic states of Central America.

The trouble which had arisen was a simple one. A big new battleship lay at moorings in the dredged-out fairway of the Tyne; McTurk in the name of the Republic of Sacaronduca wanted to take her to sea; and the British Foreign Office, having in mind that war was raging between Russia and Japan, and possessing a sore memory of the late *Alabama*, served Captain McTurk with a *ne exeat regno* through the medium of the Customs House. The word "arrest" had been a clerical error. Indeed, the Tyneside authorities had given Captain McTurk most pleasantly to understand that if he would go away quietly across the boundary ditch, and cease trying to take the first-class battleship *Last Word* with him as a keepsake, they would be delighted to see the last of him. So there is the situation in a few words.

Now every one knew (who cared to remember) that one of the great shipyards on Tyneside had recently been building the largest, swiftest, most powerful, and generally most up-to-date battleship that engineering science could devise, to the esteemed order of Japan. These large orders are always the subject of "communications to the

press," and seven times out of ten secure that thing so much sought after in commercial circles, a gratuitous advertisement in the news columns. Every one also knew that, although the empty hull was in the water, and the work on engines, armament, superstructure and the rest was pressed on at abnormal speed—the firm were actually paying time-and-three-quarters for overtime—still they could not get her out to sea before war was declared. So, as a natural consequence, if Japan was to be the purchaser, there would be an embargo on the ship till the war was ended.

Japan never pretended to be a rich country, and £1,250,000 sterling locked up in a battleship she could not use would be a serious matter to her. Therefore it was quite natural she should be willing to part with this white elephant for cash. As Commander McTurk freely pointed out, "with the knowledge gained in actual fighting round Port Arthur, it was distinctly probable that many details in the *Kanasunga's* armament would be proved obsolete by the end of the war. She was the last word in naval architecture when she was built, but fashions in warships change very quickly. It happened that Sacaronduca, with a couple of wars on hand with neighbouring states, wanted a first-class battleship right then."

It had taken Commander McTurk a good deal of trouble to find out who was really responsible for the stoppage. The actual arrest, which had taken place when the great vessel had steam up and all was ready to cast off from moorings—this

actual arrest had been performed by a respectful person who was frankly and openly an underling. He was a red-faced, whiskered man, in brass buttons and blue pilot cloth, who carried a blue paper which he wanted to nail on to the mainmast. But as the mainmast was made of steel, he borrowed a lump of elastic glue from the engine-room, and made it fast with that. After which he looked round for whisky and a talk, and got both. He was quite open in telling where his orders came from.

J. K. McTurk traced these orders upwards through a dozen individuals, and finally came across mild little Sir John Hobbs in a London club. Sir John also made no secret of his connection with the arrest.

"Of course, my dear Captain McTurk, the thing was obvious. Russia couldn't afford to let Japan have such an addition to her fleet, and so they approached our Foreign Office. The Foreign Office wrote to me, and I set the machinery in motion."

"But, my good sir, again I tell you Japan's out of the deal. Japan sold to Sacaronduca."

"Have a cigar, won't you, Captain McTurk? I'm sorry they don't keep green cigars in this club, but we pride ourselves on our Manillas. Possessions of yours, by the way, the Philippines now, aren't they? Have you ever been there?"

"Yes, sir, I went there with Admiral Dewey," said McTurk stiffly, and with a nervous hand adjusted his yellow wig.—Any reference to the Philippine campaign rasped on his nerves. It

was on a certain memorable occasion out there that he had "exceeded instructions," and had been relieved of his command. The fact that, in spite of every effort to get reinstated, he had remained on the Retired List ever since, did not tend to make him remember the locality with any lively feelings of admiration.—" But, if you please, we'll come back to Sacaronduca and the subject of this battleship."

"Certainly—certainly. Let me see, she was christened the *Kanasunga*, if I recollect aright? Very interesting ceremony a Japanese naval christening, if one may use the word. They liberate pigeons, you know, instead of breaking the usual bottle of champagne. Yes: now about the *Kanasunga*?"

"You must take it from me she's not called that, Sir John. Pending a proper christening, which I am instructed she will get on arrival, we have just named her amongst ourselves the *Last Word*."

"Very neat name that for a ship—the *Last Word*. But it hardly strikes one as Spanish. In this country of yours, Captain McTurk, Sacar-what-is-it? oh, yes, Sacaronduca, you do speak a sort of Spanish, don't you?"

Commander McTurk's red face, with its thousand tiny wrinkles, grew deeper in tint. "I don't know what they speak. I've only been attached to the Sacaronducan Navy for a month, and all that time I've spent in England."

"Ah! I see," said the little Sir John genially: "lent by your own Government? Of course, if you will just show me your credentials from

Washington, that will simplify matters a great deal. Do you like that cheroot, by the way? I don't think Manilla cheroots have improved, d'you know, since, your people occupied the Philippines."

"Let me repeat to you," said McTurk, with growing exasperation, "that I am not in any way representing the United States Government in this matter. It is painful to me to have to keep referring to the subject, but I want you to remember that I am on the Retired List of my own Service, and that I employ my time in getting professional experience elsewhere."

"Quite so—quite so. We've heard of you, Captain McTurk, in Mana-o-loa, and Port Arthur, and, as you discreetly say—er—elsewhere, so I'm sure you'll quite see the Foreign Office view."

"Sir John Hobbs, I don't like being laughed at. Now, I'd hate to quarrel with you."

"My dear fellow, I'm sure you would. Besides, I won't quarrel with you. Unofficially I sympathise with you most heartily. Officially I shan't let you go under any excuse whatever. So now throw away that cheroot, which I see you don't like, and we'll go down and dine."

A couple of hours later Commander McTurk was explaining the hopelessness of the situation to the Sacaronducan envoy in the corner of a smoke-room at the Hotel Cecil. "These British Foreign Office people," he said, "are not convinced of our *bona fides*, and for my own part I don't see why they should be convinced."

The envoy, like President Maxillo, who had appointed him, was a half-breed Toltec Indian,

and had the impudence to call himself Pizarro. Sr. Don Luis de Pizarro y Dolores he liked to be addressed on envelopes. McTurk mistrusted him implicitly, but at the same time some of the fellow's arguments were irresistible.

"My dear Capitan," he said, with a tap of his thin bird's claw of a hand, "you know very little of Sacaronduca so far, but you have some notion of our financial stability."

"If you mean instability," said the sailor, "I believe that's pretty complete."

"According to the popular European notion, yes. Indeed, if my Government wanted credit just now for so much as a packet of cigarettes, I tell you frankly they would not get it. Now, the builders of the *Last Word* live on Tyneside, and I've not heard that in canny Newcastle they are addicted to mixing up philanthropy and business. Doesn't it occur to you that they must have been paid, and paid in hard cash too, before they would let go of their ship?"

"That's right. The question is, who paid? Sir John Hobbs says it was the Japanese."

"Then let Sir John Hobbs go and see for himself who footed the bill. There he will see the name of Luis de Pizarro y Dolores, envoy plenipotentiary of the Republic of Sacaronduca."

"A fat lot," said McTurk contemptuously, "he'd be impressed by that! You might just as well have taken a paint-brush and written 'Here's Luck' in Japanese."

Pizarro's leathery cheek twitched.

"I was going to add, when you interrupted me, that the cheque which made the payment was

drawn on a New York bank, and was signed 'Israel McMechie.'"

"By Glory! is that so? It's the first time I heard McMechie was mixed up with the deal."

"It was thought," said the envoy smoothly, "that you could work with a freer hand if you were not let into the secret just at first."

"Mr. McMechie comes of a race that gets another fellow to hoe the row, and then takes the profit. The money's all right if he's footed the cheque, but I want to know why he's backing Sacaronduca."

"My country," said the envoy solemnly, "cannot manage her own finances. In return for a momentary advance she has pledged the customs receipts to Mr. McMechie's bank."

"They'll take some collecting."

"Precisely. So Mr. McMechie stipulated that the State should purchase a warship, and that he should nominate its captain and officers. Mr. McMechie," said Pizarro, with a bow, "seems to place very great confidence in you, Capitan McTurk."

"He certainly ought to, after the deals we have been in together. Though for that matter, I stick to my word, whoever it is given to. But I tell you what it is, Don Luis——" He slipped a forefinger under his wig, and scratched vexedly—"I don't fancy being McMechie's debt collector."

"Oh, as for that"—the bird's-claw fingers waved the suggestion quite away—"the lawlessness of Sacaronduca has been very much exaggerated. And besides, with the navy as an accomplished fact, any resistance to just demands, at any rate along the coast-line, would be an absurdity."

But all the same, when it came to the point, a day later, Pizarro was almost tearful in his pressure on Commander McTurk to forego position and dignity, and take any steps which would help the *Last Word* to get to sea.

So it came to pass that one Stubbs, a cheerful, competent, profane creature, of no marked nationality, was announced by the contractors as the captain appointed to take the battleship out to Los Angeles in Sacaronduca (*vice* Commander J. K. McTurk, U.S.N., resigned), and the British Foreign Office promptly withdrew its embargo. Little Sir John Hobbs even went so far as to write McTurk a letter marked "private," openly chaffing him on his failure to alter the balance of naval power in the Far East. To which McTurk wrathfully replied that he was addicted to speaking the truth; that he had said Sacaronduca, and meant Sacaronduca; and that, so far as his influence went, he would see that the *Last Word* went to Los Angeles and no other port.

Little Sir John tugged at his imperial when he got that letter, and handed the document across to his secretary. "Tell me what you think of that?" he demanded.

The secretary laughed. "It's that tall Yankee with the red face and the yellow wig, isn't it, sir? I liked that man. He was honest. But you have drawn him."

Sir John chuckled wheezily. "And made him show his hand."

"You mean he's going to sail with the ship?"

"I mean that. He didn't start with her. I had him watched, and he was in Paris when she left

the Tyne. He was running after a girl in Paris, and seemed to be enjoying himself hugely. But one afternoon he disappeared—it was the day this letter was written, by the way—and if he isn't sailing on the *Kanasunga* or the *Last Word*, or whatever they call her, as captain, this moment, well, I'm no diplomatist."

"Seemed a sound, capable man, sir."

"He's a man who'll stick to his word. Now he's been put on his mettle, he'll take that battleship out to Sacaronduca and deliver her to the authorities there. What happens after that don't concern us."

"You think she really is bound for Japan, then, sir?"

"Of course she is. There's a shady Scotch-American Jew called McMechie running the deal. But so long as she is delivered to Sacaronduca first, if she does find her way to Japan afterwards, and Russia kicks up a row, we are not responsible. There will be no second *Alabama* business landed on us. If Russia feels aggrieved she can send in her bill to Sacaronduca, and I hope she may get paid. So exit that affair; and now hand me those German papers, and let's tackle the next nuisance."

As a point of fact, Commander McTurk joined the *Last Word* in mid-Channel and in a heavy sea, boarding her with difficulty from a St. Malo fishing-lugger. Lieutenant Stubbs was unaffectedly glad to see him, and when they were alone in the charthouse said so with point and fluency.

"Then," said McTurk, "I need make no

apology for superseding you in the command. She's a very big ship, of course, and that long under-water ram is likely to make her unhandy; but still I shouldn't have thought she was beyond your handling."

"'Tisn't that," said Stubbs. "I'm Nelson on navigation and seamanship. I'd take this packet, or any other that floats, from anywhere to anywhere else. I'd navigate a coffer-dam from here to Vladivostock, if I was given the job. The thing that troubles me here is, who's my boss, and where am I going to? I came out through Tyne pier-heads thinking I was employed by the McMechie Banking Co. of New York; but the funny thing is, there's a half-breed Dago aboard here, that calls himself Pizarro, who thinks differently. He says he's admiral, and wants me to set a new course of his choosing."

"Where for?"

"Japan. Funny go, isn't it?"

"This ship goes to Los Angeles in Sacaronduca," rasped McTurk. "You will act as navigator, Mr. Stubbs, from now on, and I give you those instructions officially."

"Very good, sir,"

"What Mr. Pizarro's position on board here may be I do not know, but I am in command, and brook interference from no one."

"Oh, I've carried on quite in Navy style myself," said Stubbs, "and told him to go to the hot place pretty nearly every time he opened his mouth to speak. Oh, you can bet I know how to treat Dagos of his breed. But I'm glad to be quit of the responsibility all the same."—A steward

came in with whisky.—"I took the liberty of ordering drinks when I saw you come alongside. Here's luck, sir, with the command."

"Thank you, Mr. Stubbs. I thought of you a great deal, I can tell you, when I was in Paris."

"Ah! Paris, and a pot of red paint, when shall I see you both again? Well, Captain, and how's Paris? Tell us about it. Did you leave all the girls quite well?"

Commander McTurk's flaxen wig fairly bristled. Commander McTurk's height seemed to increase beyond its normal six feet three. Commander McTurk's manner and voice became as ice. "Thank you, Mr. Stubbs, I think that is all at present. When I have any further orders I will send for you."

Stubbs treated himself to a delighted wink as he stepped through the charthouse door. "A fair draw, that," muttered Mr. Stubbs. "I owed the Old Man a pull on his gallant leg for messing round once with a girl of mine."

But Commander John Kelly McTurk was not the man for lengthy resentment. Besides, he had just achieved one of the ambitions of his life. Let the circumstances be what they might, he was none the less in sole control of the finest battleship afloat in any sea, and he thrilled with all a naval seaman's pride in his command. The *Last Word* was literally the last word in scientific warship construction. She had a displacement of 16,000 tons, and a speed of 19 knots. She had four 12-inch guns, four 10-inch, twelve 6-inch, and 25 smaller guns. She had torpedo-tubes, armour,

engines, of the most magnificent. Her electric installation, her wireless telegraphy plant, her cellular construction, were enough to make the appreciative expert's mouth water. Her builders had turned her out for the neat round sum of £1,750,000 (which included their own modest profit), and if she did not get blown up by an inexpensive floating mine, or encounter other accidents, she might be calculated in a fleet action to be able to change the fate of nations.

Don Luis Pizarro stepped in through the charthouse door, wearing a smile on his leathery face, and holding out a lean long hand.

"I bid you welcome, Capitan."

"Thank you."

"We have got a very fine vessel under our charge."

"*I* have," corrected Commander McTurk sharply; and he added, by way of further making the position clear, "This, by the way, Mr. Pizarro, is the charthouse, and belongs exclusively to the executive."

Pizarro bowed suavely. "If you wish, Capitan, I will go to my own cabin, and invite you to visit me there. You see, I have further instructions from Mr. McMechie to hand you."

"That being so," said McTurk, "please sit down. Now, sir?"

Don Luis waved one hand, and shrugged a shoulder and a half. His motions were quite explanatory. But, as the matter was of high importance, to prevent possible misunderstanding, he translated his statement into words. "You may shift your course now for Japan, Capitan.

The Sacaronduca fable has served its purpose."

The fine red of Commander McTurk's face deepened to a full plum-colour. "What!" he rasped, "you calmly propose that I should let myself be billed all over the country as a liar, and in England of all places! You let me give every guarantee that I can think of that the Sacaronducan deal is an honest one, and then you want me to repudiate it before we've barely dropped the land?"

"You put it crudely, Capitan. But if it is not indiscreet, may I remind you that Mr. McMechie is an employer of yours, Capitan, as well as mine; and that I am in this instance merely his mouthpiece; and if this little bit of diplomacy is repugnant to your feelings as a United States naval officer, you must blame him and not me? And after all, the move was merely a piece of diplomacy."

"Whether you call it diplomacy or lying, I'll have no truck with it."

"And, anyway, if there is trouble, it will be for Great Britain to stand the racket. Surely I have not been misinformed? Surely you are not a Britisher yourself?"

"I am not a Britisher," said McTurk sourly. "In fact, very much the reverse. But I am an American officer, and I am a gentleman. You seem to have mistaken me for a swindler, or a politician, or a financier, or perhaps all three. You'd better drop the subject, Mr. Pizarro. You can take it from me that this ship is going to Los Angeles, according to my promise to Sir John

Hobbs and others, and what happens to her afterwards is beyond my concern."

"There is always the crew—and the other officers—to be considered. Of course you have weighed up, Capitan, whether they will follow out your orders or Mr. McMechie's."

"Well, no, I have not weighed out anything of the kind. I have taken it for granted that discipline would be carried out in the ordinary way."

"You have not a naval crew to deal with here," Pizarro reminded him.

"No. They are yard-hands: men used to running trial trips; experts who think that an engineer is the highest authority on God's earth, and that a Commander in the United States Navy comes a long way afterwards. Now, I know something about handling men, Mr. Pizarro, and you will see me handle these. There will be no fuss, no disturbance; they will simply carry out orders."

"But if they prefer my orders to yours?"

Commander McTurk turned on the man with a sudden ferocity. "Ah! now we come to you. Go to your room, sir, and stay there. If I find you breaking your arrest, or attempting to tamper with my crew, I'll put you in irons and gag you. No answer, sir. Go!"

Don Luis Pizarro went. He suddenly found he was very much frightened indeed of this tall, formal Commander J. K. McTurk that he met here on the high seas. This was not in the least like his acquaintance of the smoking-room at the Hotel Cecil. This was the type of man, he judged, who would hang a mutineer. And as he

reviewed his own previous conversations with officers and crew, his neck tickled.

Commander McTurk sent for Lieutenant Stubbs, and ordered a general muster of all hands on the quarter-deck at eight bells. He met them there and read his commission—he had insisted on a formal commission from the Sacaronducan Government—at which they were interested, but not remarkably impressed. They took more notice of the man than of what he said. Here was the cold, precise naval officer, accurate in uniform, formal in speech: a man capable of his own hands; a man who radiated authority. Here was a man who knew his own mind, and who intended to have his wishes carried out to the letter; and insensibly they straightened their shoulders, and dropped under his discipline, and felt the better for the change.

The rest of the voyage across to the Gulf calls for little comment. The high-class engineers nursed the new machinery as it bedded in, and there were no hot bearings; the decks were kept clean; the navigation went without hitch; and Don Luis Pizarro developed a convenient malaria, which kept him to his cabin without speech of anybody.

They steamed into the fine harbour of Los Angeles with a pennant trailing in the wake astern, and with much other naval pomp and circumstance, and only omitted the customary salute through lack of powder. Commander McTurk glowed with a fine professional satisfaction as he brought the *Last Word* up to moorings.

But his complacency was a good deal dashed by the manner of the many officials who visited him from the shore. They all of them expressed open astonishment at his arrival. They one and all slapped a pocket, winked, and frankly stated that they intended to make profit out of the ship now that she had come. They might have been drilled to the performance, so accurately did each man repeat every gesture of his predecessor. And ashore, it was the same thing over again, from President Maxillo in the Palace, down to the clerk in the hotel, who shook McTurk by the hand, and attempted to kiss him as a personal benefactor, and got knocked down for his pains.

Indeed, as the hours went on, Commander McTurk viewed his reception with growing exasperation, and at last grew so stiff and frigid to all comers that he began to be left alone, and some of his former callers made arrangements to have him assassinated on the ground that he was an obvious clog to business.

To him in this mood came a chastened and cautious Pizarro with a cable from McMechie. "I gather, Capitan, that my countrymen's manner has given you annoyance?"

"Any American," rasped McTurk, "who wants to be cured of the Munroe doctrine, had better try a week's vacation in Sacaronduca. By Glory! if I'd my way I'd let even the Germans take the place. The only thing that keeps me from resigning my commission to-day is the obvious fact that they want me to do it."

"Perhaps this cablegram from Mr. McMechie may influence your decision, Capitan."

"Well, hand it here. Hand it here, man: I'm not going to eat you—or kick you. Humph! What you've been driving at all along, Mr. Pizarro, eh? The *Last Word's* resold to Japan, is she? Well, that may be diplomacy or lying, so far as you and McMechie are concerned, but I've kept my commission clean. I passed my word to Sir John Hobbs that she was coming to Sacaronduca, and here she is. So the Sacaronducan navy's ended as soon as it is begun, is it? Well, I'm not sorry at finding myself out of a job of this kind."

Don Luis Pizarro fidgeted his lean hands. "There is another cablegram from Mr. McMechie."

"Yes?"

"Er—asking you to continue the command till the *Last Word* is handed over at Nagasaki to the Japanese."

"But—— Well, go on. I am sure you've a 'but' to follow."

"Well, you see, Capitan, it will be hard for you to resume your command just now. My countrymen have got the *Last Word* in their port, and they will not let her go without further exorbitant payment."

"The beauties! And don't they wish they may get it? Look here, Mr. Pizarro: you may cable McMechie that I'll take on this second job for him; and just you see I have a new commission properly made out."

Don Luis' thin bony hands still writhed together. "But there are other complications. There is international trouble as well. Russia has

been backed up by the British Foreign Office—and that means your Sir John Hobbs—and says she will regard the supplying the *Last Word* with coal as an unfriendly act. You will never get coal enough in Sacaronduca to carry you round. To begin with, there is none. The local coaling company sold out their stock a month ago, and the manager bolted to Venezuela with the money. To go on with——"

"Never mind the other details. If there is no coal, that's enough for me to know. We won't waste time, Mr. Pizarro. Just you come along with me, and we'll get a boat and go off to the ship at once."

"But I tell you it is impossible to get her round to Japan under the present circumstances."

"That," said McTurk, with a new geniality, "is the one and only reason why I'm going to let you see me take her there. Is that other letter for me?"

"Yes, Capitan, but I did not think it important. The postmark is Paris, and it is a lady's hand."

Commander McTurk sniffed at the scent with which it was perfumed, and then nervously straightened his flaxen wig and tore the envelope. The thousand wrinkles on his red face puckered deep with perplexity. "I'm hanged if I ever proposed to her," he muttered to himself; "but if she takes it as an engagement, I suppose I must see it through. But it's very awkward." Then, aloud, "The Havre boat gets into New York Wednesdays, I believe, Mr. Pizarro? How soon could any one landing from that boat get along here?"

"To-morrow morning," said Pizarro, promptly.

"Then come along at once. The *Last Word* is going to sail to-night."

There was considerable trouble in getting the battleship to sea, and but for the fact that the harbour forts had been disarmed during the last revolution, there would probably have been bloodshed as well. Commander McTurk, within half an hour of coming on board, convinced his crew both in the engine-room and on deck of the desirability of signing on for a further voyage, and that was a sheer triumph of his own personality over their tastes and better judgment. But steam for these enormous engines is not got up at once, and activity in the stokehold is soon advertised from the top of the smoke stacks.

There was a semaphore above President Maxillo's palace, and within very few minutes of the first feather of smoke floating out, the semaphore wig-wagged out, "*Draw fires at once: forbid you to leave harbour.*" In half an hour's time an armed launch came alongside to repeat the order; but the officer in charge was not admitted on board, neither was he accommodated with the small temporary personal loan which he said would straighten matters out. Instead (to the intense annoyance of that rigid disciplinarian, Commander J. K. McTurk) he was speeded on his way back to the jetty by a lump of coal fired by the active fingers of Lieutenant Stubbs, and a torrent of imprecations from Don Luis Pizarro, who wanted all these perquisites left for himself.

Presently, with enough steam for his windlass engines, McTurk paid out one chain, took out the shackle, hove in on the other, got his starboard anchor, and secured it on the bill board. Then link by link he hove up to the port anchor, till he rode short and ready to break out. Steam was mounting in the gauges, but still there was not enough to feed the great propelling engines, and in the meantime troops were massing ashore.

"They're pulling some horse-guns up to those heights at the back of the city," Stubbs reported. "They can't do much more than dinge the armour, that's one comfort; but I hate being fired at without smacking back."

"Train every gun that will bear on old Maxillo's palace, Mr. Stubbs."

Stubbs rubbed his chin doubtfully. "They know we've no ammunition, sir."

"I'm afraid I told them so myself," said McTurk stiffly; "but they are such a pack of liars that for that very reason they did not believe me."

"Gee-whacks!" cried Stubbs, "I bet they thought you lied," and ran off and gave orders for the laying of the guns. And when the troops and the horse batteries were nervously withdrawn, and the *Last Word* steamed presently to sea without interruption, Lieutenant Stubbs held delighted converse with the Chief Engineer. "Funny thing is," said Stubbs, "I believe our Old Man is far more mad at being thought a liar by those bastard Dagos than pleased at bringing off the most gorgeous bluff ever played in Central America. He's perched up there in

double-iced majesty, crinkling an envelope with the Paris postmark that just reeks of patchouli. I bet he's been painting Paris red before he joined. I say, Chief, do pull his leg about Alphonsine."

"He's a vera dangerous man to prrank wi'. I think from his name he'll carry Scottish bluid hissel'. Like me. But mebbe I'll ha' a haver wi' him aboot yon lass."

"I bet you his favourite two dollars and a half you don't chaff him openly about it over the mess-table."

"Mon Stubbs, the only sairtainties I ever bet upon are my own. Never the other fellow's."

Whereupon Commander McTurk joined them, with wig cocked well over one eye, and pleasure in the other "Well, gentlemen," said he, "I bet two dollars and a half we bring this ship safe across to the Japanese;" and he was much cheered by their ready laughter.

Now the coal capacity of the *Last Word* was 2,100 tons, and she had bunkered last against a Tyne coaldrop. By international agreement all coal was barred against her except that owned by the Japanese. Of course Japan has no coaling stations except on her own coasts, and with the coal she had already on board the *Last Word* could steam very little past Cape Horn.

Both officers and crew had implicit confidence in Commander McTurk, and they guessed he had something up his sleeve: a collier and a rendezvous were the favourite ideas; but he made a confidant of none of them. There was no word given to the engine-room for economy, and they

steamed on down south, leaving the South American coast farther and farther on their starboard hand. And so they came down to the latitude of the Horn, and were heading apparently for nowhere, and steaming there at highest economical speed.

Lieutenant Stubbs beat the icicles from his clothes and went down to the warmth of the Chief Engineer's cabin. "Still no change of course," he announced, "and His Unapproachableness is not the kind of man you ask questions of just now. He's steaming quite placidly into a fog like a blanket."

"Whaur can we be going to doon here?"

"Well, Chief, if you ask me, I believe he intends to run her down south to the place where you tip over, and there tie her up against the South Pole and bunker her with ice off a berg."

"Ye can no' burrn ice"—the old Chief began, and then broke off. "Ah, mon, I see ye're being wutty. Aweel, I put my bawbee on Captain McTurk. How he'll get there's no consairn o' mine. but Nagasaki he'll fetch up at. I mind there's a geisha lassie there—— Gosh, but here's a snottie come for Lootenant Stubbs."

"South Georgia, sir," said the boy. "Just raised the peaks. All change here for the South Pole. Captain's compliments, sir, and will you see all ready to moor."

"Gee-whacks!" said Stubbs. "Get the frying-pan on, Chief, and I'll bring you in a brace of polar bears for tea. I wonder if the collier's skipper has brought any newspapers."

But, to the surprise of Stubbs and to the consternation of Pizarro, there was no collier. As the *Last Word* crept into a narrow fjord by the help of the lead, Don Luis Pizarro, blue with cold, came and expostulated with Commander McTurk at having got his ship into a hopeless impasse. "You have sold us to Russia," he screamed.

"I'm going to enjoy a week's bird's-nesting," said McTurk genially. "Now get down to your room again, Mr. Pizarro, and don't you interfere. Get down to your room, sir, I say. Don't you dare splutter at me." Then, to his first lieutenant: "There are coal seams here, Mr. Stubbs, eight feet thick and close to the water. Steam coal at that. We'll get our twenty-one hundred tons on board inside a week. I'd have explained to Mr. Pizarro if he'd only come and spoken to me as a white man."

"Oh, that swine couldn't even see a Prayer-book without trying to steal the benediction for future use. Well, rebunkering in the desert Antarctic island of South Georgia beats all my going to sea. I never heard of the spot before. And I'm here to thank you in the name of the crew for finding us something to talk about for the next ten years. I hope you'll give me charge of the coaling operations, sir, and I can guarantee you'll be satisfied."

"Thank you, Mr. Stubbs. I thank you heartily for the way in which you are backing me up. I very much want to get ashore here for a few days, and the chance may never occur again."

So whilst the crew, with bag and barrow, with

improvised picks and stokehold shovels, quarried and carried coal, and shouted at the black-and-white-uniformed Johnny penguins with the gaiety of a pack of schoolboys, Commander John Kelly McTurk in ancient tweeds, and with his pockets full of tin boxes and cotton wool, faced the Antarctic weather, and ranged over the hills and valleys of the island. The eggs of rock-hoppers he took, together with Cape pigeons, stormy petrels, and great skuas, that attacked him with beak and wing when he came upon their nesting ground. He found the sheathbill too; and if the albatross had not laid an egg as big as a swan's, he could have brought twenty albatross' eggs back for his collection. But the going was uncommonly rough, the time was short, and between whiles, as far as his numbed fingers would let him, he had abundant field notes to write upon his takes whilst the subject was fresh and hot.

His steward gave him roast Johnny Petrel for dinner, and he ate it for the sake of ornithology, and found it uncommonly nasty.

The colliery work did not go on without break. For two days a blizzard howled over the island, and all hands had to stay on board, and for the most part snuggled down below and blew upon their fingers to keep them warm. A battleship built with an eye to tropical seas is not the pleasantest craft to go a-cruising in down the Antarctic. But the blizzard only seemed to bottle up their strength and energy, and on the day after it had blown out, Stubbs and the crew worked with triplicated energy in the fine dank fog that followed.

They did not get their twenty-one hundred tons of coal in the first seven days, or in the first ten. But at the end of a fortnight they were fully bunkered, and swung her with care in the narrow fjord, and crept out through the sounded channel to sea. Thereafter all felt happy, and rejoiced throughout the voyage across the Pacific, except Don Luis Pizarro. It seemed that when McTurk's back was turned, the crew had harried Don Luis (whom they did not admire) most abominably, and made him work at that South Georgia coal seam, and thereby lacerated not only his hands, but his innermost feelings. Those were the first days' work he had ever done.

A Russian cruiser squadron, which had obviously been advertised of their arrival, was out looking for them, and picked them up one tropical day, just as the sun snapped out into night. The Russians pelted the *Last Word* with a heavy and inaccurate gunfire, which Commander McTurk fairly itched to return. But fortunately the absence of ammunition saved him from piracy, and the excellence of his engines made certain of his escape from the shot which came down the converging cones of the searchlights.

But they shook these cruisers off before the dawn, and the engine-room staff came up from their sweltering tank and examined the shot-scars, and made caustic remarks on the small effect of Russian-served Geordie-built guns, on Geordie-built armour. And when it came to comparing the paper speed with the real speed of these cruisers, the engineers had to retire to their own

mess-room and get down the whisky jar to give the matter proper swing. Well, well! Why, the *Last Word*, a great hulking female dog of a battleship, only did nineteen knots on her measured mile, with best Welsh and canny firing at that; whereas those Russian beggars were swift cruisers, built for speed, and could reel off their twenty-one point eight, under natural draught, when they left the yards. "Well, well! Hinnie, I'll bother ye for the presairvative; and here's to you and me and the shops once more, and we desairve it."

Commander McTurk too felt a warmer corner towards Great Britain just then than he had ever been troubled with before. "By Glory!" he said to Stubbs, "but if I could only just handle this ship for one hour in action, and live to write a report on it to the Secretary of our Navy Board at Washington, it isn't captain of a cruiser they'd appoint me. They'd give me flag rank at once. By Glory, Mr. Stubbs, you take my word for it, she's the finest ship afloat."

"Funny thing is, those yellow monkeys of Japs are going to get her, sir, and she'll change the balance of power in the East, and they'll use her to knock spots out of the people who are nearest to white of all Asiatics. It's a bit of a mix-up.—By the way, look at that smoke ahead. Here come the Japs,—or if it isn't, we're in for more Russians and a bit of a mess."

As it turned out, the Japanese also had news of their coming, and had sent a squadron to escort them into safe waters. So the rest of the voyage bore resemblance to a triumphal pro-

cession; Banzais boomed through the air on the smallest provocation; and Don Luis Pizarro came up from below, and was tolerated. Even amongst themselves they dropped the *Last Word* as a name, and got to calling the vessel the *Kanasunga*; and presently at a Japanese island naval base, made ten days before, and crammed with men, ships, and armament, they saw the ship re-named, to the accompaniment of liberated birds and other pagan ritual, and were themselves relieved of their charge.

Commander McTurk received a decoration, received money, received also praise and thanks unbounded from inscrutable Asiatics, and wondered whether they meant all or any of it. And then he was given a passage on a destroyer to Nagasaki, and to his horror and great fear was there collected into the embrace of a mature lady, who shed rice powder on his uniform and tears on his complexion. "Oh, J. K.," she sobbed, "I've chased you round half the world, and only found you by a fluke in the end. You poor darling, what terrible risks my refusal has led you into! But, sweetheart, I did not mean it. You should not have taken me so literally in Paris. You should not have gone away at once when I said 'no.'"

So the city of Nagasaki, when it entertained him, regarded Commander McTurk as an engaged man, and the American colony (which had also entertained Lieutenant Stubbs) grinned maliciously whenever his and the lady's name were mentioned in conjunction. And by way of rubbing it in still deeper, there was a very

handsome cigar-case awaiting him from little Sir John Hobbs, of the sleepy British Foreign Office, "with best wishes for future happiness."

Commander J. K. McTurk had a very strong mind to sling that cigar-case into the sea. But he had a powerful sense of humour, and on second thoughts he retained it. He inked a date upon the leather, and to-day it rests amongst his other treasures, and hints to those in the know of a very curious entanglement and adventure.

Moreover next day there arrived a cablegram from Mr. Israel McMechie. It ran:

"*Can you go Pribyloffs? Cable. McMechie.*"

"Now, I wonder," mused Commander McTurk, "what he wants me to do in the Pribyloff Islands? But I think I'll go. It isn't a place one could very well take a lady to."

Chapter V

GREY-GREEN POWDER

"Those cigarrs," said Mr. McMechie, in his best Lowland Scottish accent—"those cigarrs are called Opulentissimos. They are of the same tobacco as the cigarrs specially made for King Edward, only the quality is slightly better. They are also a trifle heavier. I ha' them made in Havana specially for mysel'."

Commander McTurk laughed. "Are you running a McMechie Tobacco Foundry now? Genuine Havanas made of North Carolina leaf, and rolled by Chinamen in New York?"

Mr. McMechie winked a black and yellow eye. "Dinna fash yersel' wi' finance, mannie. Just enjoy your Opulentissimo as she stands, and pit twa i' your pockut to smoke i' your lodging. Weel, we're alone now. Just gie me news of your jaunt in the Pribyloffs. You found it to your taste?"

"No," said McTurk shortly, "I didn't."

"But, man, ye must have made a heap o' money oot of the business. I ken fine what my ain deevidends were."

"Oh, I suppose if you point that out, I did make a good-sized cat-boat full of dollars."

The congenial theme thawed out the Israelite

in Mr. McMechie at once. He waved the explanatory palm. "My boy, it theemth to me that you have thecured the main key to every thituation."

"That's as far as your understanding goes. Mine travels further. There are things a man may want that dollars can't buy. For instance, not all the money from here to Chicago could buy a man a step in the United States Navy—no, nor even so much as a day's seniority."

"That is becauthe it ith not many people want to buy one. For inthance, I can't imagine a buthineth man like mythelf wanting even to get into the Navy."

Commander McTurk laughed rather unpleasantly. "By Glory, McMechie, but they would give you hell if they got you in the United States Navy."

"You're putting it rather offenthively."

"Suppose we drop the Navy. I don't fancy talking over sacred subjects with you, McMechie. We'll get back to the Pribyloffs. Now you must understand that if we are to have any future dealings together, you are not to land me into an affair like that again."

"I thought," said McMechie rather plaintively, "that you would conthider the rithk counterbalanthed by the pay. You have often hinted that you didn't mind a little bit of rithk."

"I don't. I'll own up, if you like, that I've appetites that run to a little smack of mild excitement now and again. But you know quite well what I'm driving at. I'm on the retired list of the Navy; I want to be back on the active list;

"Hardly that," the girl interposed. She smiled on Commander McTurk with very friendly blue eyes, the colour of his own, and that gallant mariner sat on a chair beside her rocker without further invitation. He was always very nervous when Bridget interfered with his professional career, but there was something about Miss Ardsley that gave him confidence. "My brother, you know," she added, "was in the works where they make the new Grey-Green Powder."

Commander McTurk let his smile die away, and looked grave. It was already beginning to leak out that something very terrible was happening to every one employed in the Government manufacture of the new explosive.

"He has completely lost his memory," she went on sadly, "and the Government, I consider, have treated him very harshly. Of course he had to be relieved of the appointment for the time being, but they hold out no prospect of reinstating him if he recovers, or, indeed, of giving him any employment whatever."

"It seems," ventured Commander McTurk, "a very mysterious business altogether. Of course, I have only heard what the ordinary man in the street hears, but there are rumours that others have gone wrong. Brain trouble, I heard it called."

"You needn't mince matters, J. K.," said his sister. "Barring William Ardsley, who is as harmless, and as pleased, and as empty-minded as a baby three years old, every other man or girl who has had to do with the making of this Grey-Green Powder in the Government factory—

in the Government factory, mark you—is in a lunatic asylum."

McTurk turned sharply down to his host. "Does the McMechie Explosives Company also make this new powder?"

"Speaking as the company's chairman," said Mr. Israel McMechie, "I am free to tell you that it does. It is the Service powder adopted for both the U.S. Navy and the Army, and," he added with a sigh and an explanatory tremor of the right palm, "we hoped to hold a monopoly. We are making a very nithe profit."

"Till the Government cut in with a factory of its own and competed with you, and made you drop prices?"

"The Government," said McMechie drily, "is not competing at present, as its factory has been shut down since poor Ardsley—er—resigned. He was director, you know, and so far they have not appointed a new one. I signed a contract to-day, on behalf of my own company, for a very large parthel, at an advanced figure. A very pleathant figure indeed, my boy."

Miss McTurk scratched the end of her nose with a thoughtful forefinger. "I think, J. K., that we'll have to tell Miss Ardsley that this inquiry I was going to propose is beyond your scope. I should just hate to have you running up against Mr. McMechie."

Some idea on much the same lines was passing through Commander McTurk's own head, and the thousand tiny wrinkles which seamed his red face distinctly deepened. He looked squarely down at McMechie. That good man was on the

verge of an explanation. But he clenched together his two active palms, and said curtly enough: "Please don't consider me."

But Commander McTurk's glance swung round till it met Miss Ardsley's pleading blue eyes, and his mind was made up without further ado. "I come in," he announced; "and I'm open to offer you a side bet of just two dollars and a half, McMechie, that one way and another I grab a very fine pool."

"The chips will do for me without side bets," said McMechie sourly, and drew flame into another big-gauge cigar; then he relapsed into a stout and sulky silence.

Now, later on, and away from the glamour of Miss Ardsley's presence, the more Commander McTurk thought over the matter into which he had been drawn, the less he liked the prospects. As a modern naval officer, very much in love with his profession, he had a sound general knowledge of the varying powers of black and nitro powders, and a very vague theoretical idea of their compositions. As to the new Service explosive, Grey-Green Powder, as it has been named, he knew nothing of its military value. He knew only of its effect upon some of its makers; and, in flat truth, these were enough to have frightened Farragut.

As has been shown before in these memoirs, Commander John Kelly McTurk carried a fine physical bravery. He saw risks clearly, and took them with a high courage and an unruffled spirit; by sea and shot he had hazarded his bones and body a hundred times. But here was a peril such

as he felt no man before had ever been called upon to face; here he would have to stand the fire of some unholy missile which killed the mind and left the body sound.

Thoughts, horrible, detestable thoughts, shot through him and made his shoulders shrug and shiver, and involuntarily his hand took out a handkerchief and wiped the cold sweat from his face. But it was that very action that pulled him up. He stood to his feet and swore. And then—

"By Glory!" he muttered, "this won't do. This looks like losing my nerve. Result of being out of collar too long. Now, what's the cure? Good rousing, interesting work, with a chunk of risk in it. Well, I guess that's waiting right here."

He sat down to the table and framed a letter to Miss Ardsley there and then, and it is characteristic of the man that beyond a bare acceptance of the ordnance investigation, and an easy assurance that the matter would be brought to a successful issue, the letter was on alien subjects. Indeed, most people would have described it as a love-letter. That night he packed his pockets with patent medicines of varying degrees of uselessness, and took the cars, bound for a station deep in the Vermont woods.

A Government nitro powder, though used for unlovely ends, is often made amongst the most romantic surroundings. The mill which produced Grey-Green Powder was a series of small frame huts, linked by wooden tram-rails, and set down in the aromatic clearings of a pine forest. Turbines in a mountain stream gave power.

The sun that sailed above was the only illuminant. In felt-soled shoes Commander McTurk stalked down aisles of the trees, listened appreciatively to the songs of birds, and wished much that it was nesting time, so that he could add eggs to his collection. He had with him some Bristol boards and a tin box of oil-colours, and from time to time he sat down on a tree-stump when a view appealed to him, and with his thumb smeared colour on a card. He would have quite admitted that the results could have conveyed no hint to anybody but himself. He looked upon these efforts as mere colour-notes for future sketches. And between-whiles, ever and anon, he would come across a line of wooden rails, brass-spiked to wooden ties, and stained with the brass wheels of a former truck service. Time after time he followed these up and came upon some flimsy wooden shed roofed with cockled shingles, and tucked away in an inconsiderable clearing. These were marked Mixing House, Nitric Acid Store, Glycerine Store, and other names, all in staring red letters that shouted a command for caution. Many of them carried a smell which advertised their uses. But all were deserted by human workmen, and in one a pair of red squirrels were building a nest amongst protruding thermometers.

Commander McTurk wandered over the place for a couple of days alone, and collected a pile of incomprehensible sketches and a sound knowledge of local geography; and then Miss Ardsley joined him, and he covered the same ground a second time much more pleasantly. He made inroads too into that young woman's regard, and

in his susceptible heart there grew a feeling that here at last was the one girl for him in all the world.

But Miss Ardsley on her part viewed the companionship with a growing disquietude. She had seen her brother, the mere empty husk of a man, with the mind, the soul, entirely gone. She had not seen, but she had heard horrifying tales of those others who had worked at this Government manufactory, whose sense had been displaced by delusions, who had become cunning, dangerous maniacs. And when she looked up at this tall, cool, red-faced man, who stalked beside her over the same tainted ground, and bent his head and peered into the same poisonous huts which had dealt such terrible disaster to these others—why, then her courage failed her, and not even for a brother's sake could she expose him also to the dreadful risks.

Still she had the tact to put her dismissal on another ground. "Captain McTurk," she said, as they sat together that night after dinner on the piazza of the little summer hotel, "I have been thinking the matter over very deeply, and I have come to the conclusion that you and I are not the people to discover what it is that has wrecked the brains of all these poor fellows. The whole thing is too highly technical for lay-folk like ourselves."

"I quite agree," said McTurk readily, "that it is no place for you. I just shudder to think of the risks you have been taking. But for me, those all come in the way of business. You know I was brought up in one of the United States

Services, and it has grown to be a habit with me to give the United States a friendly push along whenever I see a chance. And I guess, Miss Ardsley, I have to thank you very much for showing me a chance right here."

The girl sat sharply forward in her rocker. "Have you found out already what is wrong?"

"I think I am on the track."

"Is it one of Mr.——"

Commander McTurk interposed sharply. "I am sure we had better not mention any names at this stage of the proceedings."

"But think," cried the girl, "of the incredible baseness of any one doing such a thing as this merely for the sake of commercial profit! I've had my own ideas as to where the trouble came from, since the moment I heard that Grey-Green Powder was made in a private factory without bad results to the work-people, and that the private factory owners were sore at losing their monopoly."

The thousand tiny wrinkles on Commander McTurk's red face deepened anxiously. "I'd hate to have you going off with any wrong ideas."

"Then you had better correct them. Come, tell me what you have found out."

It was a hard wrench for Commander J. K. McTurk. Here was a pretty girl looking at him with blue eyes in a way that made his pulse quicken, and using tones that would have coaxed secrets out of a Royal Arch Mason. But he was a man with an extraordinarily high sense of duty, and he held back his information resolutely.

"My dear," he said tenderly, "I'd do most things for you, but the United States comes first. I want badly to put the Government Grey-Green Powder Factory on its feet again. But I may tell you that, if I do that, it will mean that your brother will also be cured, and carry his old brain and his old memory and be exactly as he was before." And with that she had to be satisfied, for Commander McTurk resolutely refused to follow the subject further.

But Miss Ardsley had her small revenge. She had seen some of poor McTurk's pictures, and she asked questions about them, and about his ideas of impressionist art, that fairly made him writhe. And presently, when in the same artless style she began examining him as to whether he really took seriously his own theories that a thumb or a palette-knife could produce more intelligent work than the ordinary paint-brush of convention, the end of his endurance was reached, and he fairly turned tail and fled from the piazza.

She looked after him with a little smile. "You're a dear," she muttered, "and for two pins I'd be in love with you. It's just splendid to see you pull yourself up to about nine feet high, and put your hand where your sword isn't, when any one says 'United States.' But you mustn't try and baulk an American woman when she's after information, or you'll have to be smacked on your very tenderest spot just by way of discipline. All the same, I hate being cruel, and I'll be real sweet to you over your twaddling painting if ever you dare to show so much as a tube of colour when I'm round again."

Now, outsiders contrive but very rarely to see the most of the game. Still, now and again they blunder into a full view of some point that the expert misses; and Commander McTurk, who was only an indifferent chemist, and certainly no mental specialist, had walked straight upon a trace that the Government medical men must have brushed against a score of times in their comings and goings, but continued always by the law of chance to pass unseen. It was merely an ordinary medicine bottle, with table-spoon doses marked in bars down one side and a cork in the mouth stained to a vivid scarlet. The dregs of some scarlet liquid lurked in the angles of the bottle, and on one side was a gummed label bearing the imprint of a chemist in the city of Mexico. On the label was written, presumably in the chemist's writing, the words, "The prescription." Below it was pencilled in another hand this further rubric,—"*The insane root.*"

The bottle lay not six yards from one of the wooden tram-tracks. It rested on a little hill covered with pine-needles on which McTurk had seated himself with paint tubes and prepared board to take a colour note of a particularly fine vista of cobalt sky and red tree-trunks.

It was a dazzle of sunshine reflected from the glass that first caught his eye. Then he saw the Mexican chemist's label, and his thoughts leaped with a bound from painting to the grave matter which brought him to these woods. The bottle lay in a little crater of pine-needles, and presently Commander McTurk decided that it had been buried once—presumably by the man who had

brought it there, and afterwards disinterred by curious squirrels. He was within an ace of pulling out the scarlet-stained cork and sniffing the contents, but his glance fell on that pencilled memorandum—*insane root*—and he left it alone. That night he sent the bottle, carefully packed, and with a letter of hints, to a clever analyst.

Three days went by before he got a reply, and during those three days, being deprived of Miss Ardsley's society, he worked with a savage energy. He had got a long step further with his inquiry when the analyst's letter came. It ran:

"*My dear J. K.,*

"*We don't let on to the great American public that it is so, but you can take it from me that chemical analysis has its limits. I can no more analyse the stuff you sent me than invent wings for a crocodile. There is a strontium salt present in minute quantities —say one per cent.—and the rest is organic and undecipherable. But if I can't tell you what it's made of, I can tell you what it is and does. It's an infernal concoction produced by an obscure Indian tribe in Mexico, which, rubbed on the hands or any part of the body, acts directly on the brain (presumably through the blood), and causes dementia in various degrees. The stuff is not so common as it was formerly, because the Mexican authorities very rightly shoot any one they catch making it; but I know it's still on sale if you go to the right market. However, if you'll take the cinch from me, you'll let it alone. It's dangerous stuff for a layman to meddle with, and I'd like you to keep intact all the brains you have at present under your hair.*"

Commander McTurk swore as he read that last word, and put his fingers gingerly to his yellow wig and wondered savagely whether his friend had guessed it was not a natural-grown covering.

But he was soon back again at the graver matter. He now knew with absolute certainty that this epidemic of madness amongst the poor wretches in the Grey-Green Powder Works was not due to accident; the contagion had been spread deliberately; the whole trouble had been arranged with cold-blooded calculation.

Once he had been in a dynamite factory and had seen nitro-glycerine mixed up by hand with absorbent clay, and had heard how new workers always suffered from excruciating headaches. He had got a touch of this headache himself by way of sample. But a dynamite worker is inoculated by a week's work, and the headaches go for good. There was, unfortunately, more permanence about the Grey-Green Powder ailment.

At what point of the manufacture the poison could have been introduced there was little doubt, either. Indeed, the hut—the biggest of the settlement, and in quite a bulky clearing of the pines—was marked "Handling House" in the noisiest of red lettering. He had found the empty bottle only a score of yards away from it. The poison could have been dropped into the meal-like powder as it lay on the handling tables any time between dusk and sunrise, for there was no artificial light in the place, and the workers were only on the ground whilst the sun's glow poured down through the pines. During the hours of dark the factory was left to the squirrels and

the chipmunks and the other wild things whose forest it had invaded.

Remained then the problem of who had brought the abominable stuff from Mexico, and over this knotty point Commander McTurk smoked the larger part of a box of rank green cigars. To be blunt, he had suspected Mr. Israel McMechie from the very start. He knew that his Hebrew acquaintance was troubled with very few scruples when money was to be made; with McMechie all was moral that did not actually pack one off to gaol; and over the matter of Grey-Green Powder he had the natural soreness of a monopolist who sees his monopoly taken away. But the man's cleverness was notorious, and his ability to cover up his tracks amounted to genius. Indeed, McTurk quite admitted that if it had not been disinterred by squirrels, even the medicine bottle which had given him the hint would have been locked securely from sight.

Then of a sudden he saw the next move clearly indicated, and an hour later had taken a sleeping-berth in the through train for the city of Mexico.

Now, as to the exact details of what happened down there in that warm and beautiful republic, the present historian has to confess much ignorance. Commander John Kelly McTurk and Miss Ardsley "had nothing to communicate about the matter"; Miss Bridget McTurk dratted my impudence for inquiring; and Mr. McMechie asked me to dinner, and laughed, and reeled out for an entire evening obvious lies which were very amusing at the time, but which could

earn no place in these pages. But that McTurk got hold of the chemist who sold the scarlet liquid is a sure thing, as also that he dragged the creature to some point outside the city where President Porfirio Diaz' law did not carry. It was there that he induced him to tell the name of his New England customer, and one can imagine (knowing McTurk, and his views on the matter) that the persuasive methods were rough. But this, as I say, is only guesswork, as not one word of what actually did happen has ever leaked out.

The Mexican chemist, it might be supposed, would have had a wish to warn his correspondent in Vermont that the matter of their business connection was known to a certain Commander J. K. McTurk, U.S.N., which he could have done very conveniently by telegram whilst that lengthy mariner was posting northward in the cars; and the fact that he did not do this thing, rather hints that he was for the time being incapacitated The further detail that McTurk arrived north again with one ear bound up in sticking-plaster, also hints that some sort of trouble occurred down there in Mexico. But still, this again is guesswork.

But the fact that looms big about that journey is Miss Ardsley's reception of Commander McTurk at the end of it. The sailor noticed the change the first moment he saw her on the platform. He strode up, and took her hand.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "You look ill. Tell me what has been bothering you. Let me help."

She almost snatched her hand from him. "Never mind my looks, Captain McTurk, and please don't concern yourself further with my feelings and welfare. Believe me, you might be vastly better employed."

McTurk's red face deepened in tint. "I don't know what has happened to you, but I have brought news that ought to be to your taste. I can punish the man that tampered with your brother."

She shook her head. "I am afraid you are deluding yourself. I am dreadfully sorry that I ever brought you into this matter."

He looked down at her queerly. "Has something altered your views since I have been away?"

She gave a little gasp. "Yes," she said.

"Has Bridget been interfering?"

"Oh, Miss Bridget, loyal soul, disapproves of me utterly, and you'll find a letter waiting for you which I am sure says all that and more. But it isn't that. I'd rather, if you please, that you should let the matter alone. Believe me, you can do no good in it now,"—she hesitated a little, and then added,—"so far as my brother William is concerned."

"I've started,' said McTurk doggedly, "and I'm going to see it through."

"You're running a frightful risk."

He waved that gently aside.

"Besides—oh, how can I tell you?—besides, you will drag in people you never thought of implicating."

"Ah," thought McTurk, "and now we've got

to it. She thinks I'm gunning for McMechie; and she's got fond of him. Well, myself I should have hanged McMechie if it could have benefited the United States, though I should have hated to do it. I thought once I should have to do it. But as it is, we're both wrong." Then aloud: "Miss Ardsley, if I tell you in dead confidence that it's a Mr. Burlingame who's the head rogue, would that bring your interest back to the matter?"

She stared at him with wide eyes. "Mr. Burlingame! Who's he?"

"The man who bought that abominable stuff from the Mexican chemist."

She stared at him still, and cleared her throat. She did not seem able to speak. She shook her head.

"I think," said Commander McTurk gently, "that you had better go back to the hotel, and perhaps lie down for a bit. Something has upset you."

He slipped his hand within her arm, and without another word she let him lead her away.

Now the Mexican chemist, under a compulsion that it gives one chills down the spine to think about, had written to his correspondent Mr. Burlingame, requesting an interview, and appointing the Government Grey-Green Powder Factory as a rendezvous.

"The Mixing House, where I saw you before," was suggested as an appropriate place of meeting, and "the usual time, 9 p.m.," was pointed out as being both safe and convenient.

Most men proposing to keep such an appointment in such a place, an appointment capable of such terrific alarms, would have taken a revolver as close companion, and probably have had an escort within call; but it is characteristic of Commander McTurk that he carried with him no more lethal weapons than his own two hard and useful fists, and not only went alone, but told no one of his errand. He had a fine confidence in his own great strength and activity in the first place; and in the second, if kudos was to be gained, he preferred it undivided. He just hungered to score up some action to his credit which would force the Navy Board at Washington to replace his name once more on the active list.

It is equally characteristic of the man that he swallowed an ample dose of some rubbishy patent medicine before starting, on the strength of an advertisement that claimed for it a singular power (amongst a score of other properties) of "preventing nervous disorders."

He arrived at the rendezvous with the last of the twilight, and on coming out into the clearing caught a moment's sight of a man lurking amongst the shadows of the farther pines. Rapid action began from that moment. The man withdrew into the gloom of the tree aisles, and with a sailor's quick thought McTurk decided that he ought to know what the fellow was doing there. Instantly he broke into a run, and in a dozen strides his long legs had carried him across the little clearing.

The man also started to run, but not with the same quickness; and when he commenced to

race and dodge amongst the pines, Commander McTurk was not twenty yards from his heels.

The man felt that he was being rapidly overtaken. He swung in behind one of the larger trunks, pulled out a revolver, and panted out a threat and a cry to halt.

"If you shoot me I'll murder you," rasped McTurk, and ran on harder than before. Then, as vicious flashes began to spit out from the gloom, he zigzagged in his course to upset the enemy's aim, but charged on as hard as ever.

Five shots the man managed to pull off, but to none of them did his tall opponent flinch; and then, with a twist and a wrench the revolver changed hands, and a sledgehammer blow sent the man spinning backwards on to the pine-needles.

Commander McTurk stood over him and nursed some damaged knuckles. "So much for being an amateur," said he. "Half the fools in America think they can use a gun, and it's dead easy to rush them when they pull one. I know I can't shoot worth a cent, and so I don't carry a revolver to hamper my movements, and that's why I come in with the old-fashioned tools, most every time. Now, Mr. Burlingame, you need not pretend to be stunned any longer. I've seen you open your eyes already. Sit up, sir, at once, or, by Glory, I'll use my feet to you."

The man sat up somewhat unsteadily. "Who are you?" he asked, "and what do you want? How did you know I was Burlingame?"

"Well, sir, unless it is a habit with you to try and murder innocent strangers, I guess you've

found most of the answer to those questions already. You're here as the result of my letter, I take it?"

"The letter from—well, Mexico. But you didn't write that letter."

"We'll say I dictated it," said McTurk grimly. "The question now is, am I here as a private lynching party of one, or are you going to undo the harm you have done?"

"What harm? You must speak plainly." Mr. Burlingame was shifting uneasily on his seat of pine-needles.

"Just you sit still there. Sit still, I say, sir, or I'll thump you again in a way you won't like. And hold up your hands. Yes, lift them up like that and clasp them on the top of your head. Now stay right so till you receive further orders."

Commander McTurk lifted the bottom of his waistcoat, and proceeded to unwrap a three-fathom length of rope from his middle. He showed an eye at the end. "I turned in that splice myself, Mr. Burlingame, and now we'll pass the end through, and there is a hangman's noose. I believe professionally a little grease is used to make it slip a bit more kindly, but I can't see that you are worthy even of the consideration of grease on your noose. Don't you dare move, there! If you show dangerous again, I bet two dollars and a half I'll put such a head on you as you never saw even in a dime museum. Now, that bough up there is just made for a gallows. We'll heave the hauling end over, so, and there we have the whole mechanism, complete and deadly.

Now, Mr. Burlingame, if you have any reason to advance why you shouldn't be strung up without further talk, you may as well get it out and over."

"If," said the man, "you mean to commit murder, get along with it. I don't think I remarkably care. I'm not having such an out-of-the-way good time of it."

"I regard myself for the time being, sir, as the common hangman — an occupation which is humble, if you like, but useful. You have not been actually killing men, Mr. Burlingame, but you have been killing their minds and stealing their memories, which in my idea is worse. Anyway, you aren't fit to live."

"Mention any one man in particular whose cause you are taking up."

"Right. I can do that in two words. William Ardsley."

Mr. Burlingame gave a nervous laugh. "I thought as much. You are my sister's nominee. Why in thunder must women always interfere?"

"What? Do you mean to say that you are William Ardsley?"

"Cert. I'm supposed to be like my sister, too. But I suppose it is too dark for you to see that."

In his perplexity Commander McTurk fidgeted with his wig till he brought it well down over his forehead. Then he bethought himself of the contents of his pockets, and produced two candles, which he lit and stuck with their own wax to the ruddy stem of a pine. It was the same pine whose outstretched branch carried the rope.

"Yes," he said, after a careful examination, "you have some of Miss Ardsley's features."

"You will find the name W. Ardsley on my linen, if you want a further certificate."

"We'll take that as read. I don't see that making yourself out to be Mr. William Ardsley gets you any further from your hanging. If you have anything to say in your defence, I am ready to hear it."

The prisoner on the ground was chilled with a greater fear just then than any he had felt before. Here in front of him was some one quite strange. Here was not the tall, spruce, active man who had so pluckily charged up to his revolver and knocked him down. Here was a man with the official flavour—the naval flavour—used to being judge, an expert tester of witnesses, a man without feelings to work upon, a man who would be cold, formal, microscopically just. The prisoner was called upon for a defence. Volubly he commenced it; haltingly and with more exactness of truth he carried it through under the glare of Commander McTurk's steady blue eye.

It seemed that Mr. William Ardsley felt himself to be a much aggrieved man. He had passed through Harvard, and had gained there perhaps more knowledge of chemistry than of commerce. He had got a berth in an explosives factory, and soon tired of working for some one else on a salary. So he started for himself. He owned to having an insufficiency of capital, and one deduced that he also failed to bring into the concern a sufficiency of experience. He got into difficulties. The place was seized by a creditor, and promptly

sold to the United States Government at an exorbitant profit; and there lay the chief of his grievances.

"Do I understand from you," rasped McTurk, "that as a first step to repurchasing the works you got yourself taken on by the United States Government as director?"

"That's right."

"With a view of bringing down the value of the place, or in other words of swindling the United States?"

"Oh, the United States is fair game. Everybody plucks meaty bits off the great American eagle when they get the chance."

"That, of course, is not true; but if it represents your code of morality I understand you. Please go on."

"I should have thought you might have guessed the rest."

"I guess nothing when I am trying a man for his life," said the judge icily.

"Well, I got hold of that scarlet stuff from Mexico, and used it on all the employees it would act upon. As for my own loss of memory, of course that was sham—just to pile up the agony, you know, and get the mills shut down. I didn't see any other way of forcing the Government's hand. There's no reason for you to get excited over it. Men who work in explosive factories are prepared for big risks. Nothing would have been said if the whole crew had been blown to glory, so I don't see there need be much chatter about their being put out of the way in this other fashion."

"Ah," said McTurk, "that the way you look at it. My view differs. It seems to me that the surface of the earth would be healthier without your trampling on it further." He made a sudden dive and seized his prisoner's hands, and tied them behind his back. "Now, if you'll kindly stand up—so—and walk underneath that tree, I'll have you hanged without further delay."

"Good God, Captain McTurk, this is murder. *G-r-r-ch!* You're strangling me. Give me a moment. You spoke of my sister—just think of how she'd feel if you hanged me."

"Does she know you're Burlingame?"

"Certainly not. She couldn't have found that out."

"But she does know there's something fishy?"

"Well, I forgot to keep up the loss of memory wheeze—thought it didn't matter before her, you know; and she cut up rusty."

"Then," said Commander McTurk, "she'll regret your loss less than I thought," and stood back and took a good grip of the rope.

"*G-r-r-r-ch!* Stop, man, stop! Give me another moment, for God's sake. Here, I'm not fit to die like this. Let me make some reparation first."

"If you're thinking of the United States Government, you needn't worry. I'm in present charge of their Grey-Green Powder Factory, and also of this rope."

"But the men, the employees. You can't cure them, can you?"

"Perhaps not."

"You can't, man—you can't. I can. Look you, I'll buy my life of you. Let me down, and

I'll cure them. I can undo all the mischief. I swear I can."

"Yes, but what guarantee have I that you will stick to your word? I can't keep you with this rope round your neck indefinitely."

"I shall stick to it. If I fail, you can expose me, have me arrested, and leave the rest to the lawyers."

"Yes," said Commander McTurk grimly, "and the lawyers would find they'd no law to fit your case, and they'd let you off. No, sir, I've got you now, and I'll hold you till you hang, or till you undo your harm. Tell me now, what and where is your antidote?"

The man hesitated.

"Let me freshen your memory," said McTurk, and swayed on the rope. Presently he let the fellow down again, choking and writhing. "Now, Mr. Ardsley, gather your wits and answer quick. The next time you go up on this rope, it will be to stop."

"In the headquarters laboratory, in my private room, there is a press over the mantelshelf."

"I've seen it. There are two bottles in it, one of red stuff, one of green."

"That's right. The green stuff is the antidote. The red is more of the poison."

"And you guarantee the efficacy of the antidote?"

"I give you my word for it."

"Then," said Commander McTurk, "we will see how you like relying on your own word. I know the action of the red stuff, and I shall dose

you with that first. Steady now there, Mr. Ardsley! Don't you try and break away like that, or I shall pull the noose tight again. After you have descended to the level where you sent the other poor fellows, I guarantee you shall have your dose of the antidote equally with them. If it effects a cure, I shall be very glad for all of you. Do you hear? By Glory, but he doesn't. The fellow's fainted."

* * * * *

Now, Governments are always unsatisfactory taskmasters, and the United States Government in particular, either through ignorance or through a sense of grim humour, was found by Commander McTurk at times to approach the intolerable. He presently had it admitted by those in authority that he had scored a triumphant success in his investigation of the trouble at the Government Grey-Green Powder Mills in the Vermont woods, and he confidently looked for promotion and employment in his own particular Service, the Navy. But lo, the Ordnance Board stepped in and claimed him; voted him the princely donation of $280; and pressed upon his acceptance a vacant post in a victualling yard. He wrote to the Secretary of the Navy Board at Washington, forwarding these offers as enclosures, and demanding employment in his own proper Service. But not a ghost of a promise could he extract. That wretched time (he realised sadly) when he had "exceeded instructions" was still scored up in big red letters across his record.

From his sister, too, Miss Bridget McTurk, he

got but scanty consolation. She scratched her nose with a long forefinger and shook her yellow head at him. "I wish, J. K., that when I find you a job, and there's a woman somewhere or other in it, you wouldn't see it as your bounden duty to fall in love with her. I can tell you I've had quite a pile of trouble with that Miss Ardsley since she came back from that place where you met in the woods."

"I wish you wouldn't interfere with my affairs, Bridget."

"Poof! boy," said his sister placidly, "don't wrinkle up your face at me like that. It makes you look old. And as for interfering, why, think what a precious mess you make of things when I'm not near to tidy up. I believe you'd have married that Ardsley girl with a very little persuasion."

"I may do yet."

"Well, you'll have to wait till her present husband's dead, then, and I must say he looks tough enough."

"What's that?"

"Oh, she's married right enough. They'd been engaged a year, and had some tiff about that blackguard William, and then the engagement was off. That's when you came on the carpet, J. K. But when she owned up to the fellow that dear brother William was a blackguard, they just sobbed a little on one another's necks and got married without waiting for the presents to come. What's that you said? J. K. McTurk, kindly stand up and look me in the face, and repeat that word."

"Never you mind what I said," grumbled Commander McTurk. "I meant it, anyway," he added defiantly. "I seem to have made a pretty bad muddle of the whole job from my own point of view from start to finish. Here's McMechie sending me a box of infernal cigars about a foot long, called Opulentissimos. He says he knows I went gunning for him, and has told everybody so, and has got so much sympathy in Government quarters that they've given him contracts at his own figure for Grey-Green Powder up to three years ahead, just to soothe his wounded feelings. What do you think of that, Bridget? McMechie comes in as usual. Would you like me to say over again the remark you objected to just now?"

"Well, John Kelly," said Miss McTurk thoughtfully, "I think you may just say it once—and I'll bear half the blame. Drat that McMechie!"

Chapter VI

THE SULTANA

"It's a mighty bad bar," said Commander McTurk, peering at the spouting tumble of beer-coloured waters when the green-painted surf-boat heaved up on a wave. "I bet two dollars and a half we get swamped if we try and run in."

"It's a jolly sight worse beach," Brigg commented, "and I'm open to betting all eternity to a tin-tack we get smashed to the smallest kind of smithereens if we have a shot at a landing there. Why, I doubt if even a Krooboy could swim in through that surf; and anyway I'll swear that an ordinary Yankee and an ordinary Britisher can't, however much they may fancy themselves in the water."

"The tornado will be here in an hour sure, and may be less. Look at the way it's banking up. The sky's like ink already."

The English trader wiped his wet forehead with a white drill sleeve. "Yes, the air's pretty breathless and stale, isn't it? Well, a West African tornado's a great thing for clearing the air, and rearranging the landscape, and sweetening things up generally. I wish I was back amongst the bad smells of Malla-Nulla factory, enjoying a nice racking fever."

The Krooboys at the paddles had broken off their song some time since, and were chattering anxiously over the outlook; and presently the head-man, who straddled on the stern thwart sculling thoughtfully with the long steering-sweep, gave voice to their wishes.

"Oh, Brigg!"

"Well, Brass-Pan," said the Englishman, "what is it now?"

"We no fit for stay here."

"You no fit for lib for beach?"

"Savvy plenty."

"And you no fit for run dem bar?"

"Savvy plenty."

"Then keep your yam-box shut unless you've got something sensible to say."

Brass-Pan grinned. "Lib for drown the whole jim-bang, if we stay, Brigg."

"Confound you, yes. You're just like the Opposition in Parliament: you can only criticise; you've no constructiveness."

"No savvy."

"You wouldn't. Well, Brass-Pan, in the blessed language of the Coast, you say bar no good, beach no good, sea no good. D'you savvy 'nother palaver?"

"Savvy 'nother plenty-too-good. We lib for shelter Ju-ju River one-time."

"Oh, the devil!" said Brigg, plainly startled. "Is that unholy ditch near here? I didn't know. But what chance is there, I wonder, of getting out again?"

"Suppose," said Commander McTurk, "you come down to my level and speak plain

United States, and tell me what all this is about."

The green surf-boat swung skywards on a wave, and Brigg thrust out a finger towards the place where the river bar sent up yellow fountains between the two low green mangrove shores. "That's White Post River, that you wanted to visit, and that you hired me to take you to. Well, there my accurate geography of this part of the Coast ends."

"You only know of this Ju-ju River, that your head-man talks about, by hearsay?"

"Just hearsay." The Krooboys had settled themselves on the gunwales of the surf-boat, and were stabbing rhythmically at the water alongside with their trident-headed Accra paddles; the great muscles of their backs and shoulders gleamed under the sweating skin; the head-man crammed on his bowler hat, and sculled his best with the steering-oar; and the huge Atlantic swell rolled in abeam as the course changed. "But I suppose we shall know more of the infernal place presently, if the bar down there doesn't happen to be as bad as this. You see our gentle savages have made up their minds we're going there, and I suppose we're right to try. Anyway, it's our only chance.—Hi, you Brass-Pan! tell dem canoe-boys I fit for dash one case of gin if they get us in before the breeze comes. Tell 'em it's much warmer to be chopped than drowned any day—especially if you're stewed up with peppers."

The joke was translated, and the paddlers

roared with ready laughter. The Krooboy has a keen sense of humour, and if his jests have a grisly and a personal flavour he likes them all the better. Moreover, he has not sufficient brain to carry him more than a few hours into the future, and so his merriment is not dimmed by thoughts of possible happenings on ahead.

Commander McTurk slipped a surreptitious handkerchief under his yellow wig and wiped away the perspiration. "I wish," he said irritably, "you'd tell me what's before us."

"The unknown, I guess, and certainly the unexpected. You see this Ju-ju River the boys are talking about is in German territory; and it always did run to a very ugly reputation, even before the white man discovered it, and that is not so very long ago. It's just a hotbed of secret societies and ju-ju."

"What's ju-ju?"

"General West African term for something you don't understand—sort of things like charms taboos, poison, magic, witchcraft, or finding powdered glass in your porridge. It's invariably unpleasant, and nine times out of ten you can't make out how or why it works. Understand?"

"I don't know that I do; but go on.—I say, Brigg, if this boat swings about much more, I shall disgrace the United States Navy and be sea-sick. I think it must be that infernal parrot pie at your factory that disagreed with me."

"Don't apologise. A surf-boat in a bad roll has been known to upset the stomach of a pot idol. Well, to continue. You can imagine that ju-ju priests and past provincial grand masters

of secret societies would scarcely approve of the German official who thought he knew how to colonise, and didn't. They stood it for a bit after they were annexed—hadn't heard of mailed fists, and didn't know they were annexed, I guess —and the Germans got badly on their nerves, and so they set to work and gave them a particularly fancy time of it. Their pet ways of torturing prisoners are things you can only talk about to men; but if you'd care to hear . . . ?"

"No," said McTurk, "you can skip that." He took a small tube of pills from his pocket, and swallowed about a third of its contents. Brigg watched him with open dissent.

"Those Blue Shield Febrifuge pills aren't worth a little tin hang, and I ought to know I've been a Coaster eight years now, and I've swallowed, at the very lowest computation, four tons seventeen hundredweights of medicine —most of it patent—and I know the exact value of each of them, from Eno down to Williams. But I tell you, Captain, there's nothing like this where we are going. Look!" He whipped out a bottle of quinine, tapped a dose of the feathery powder on to a cigarette paper, rolled it into a ball, and swallowed it with a click of the tongue. "Now, that stuff gets to the spot and fights the little fever devils without any delay whatever; and shan't I have a head on me, like a concertina, in two hours' time!—Hullo, Captain!"

"Precisely. I told you that parrot pie was going to win out. I'm feeling pretty pale."

Brigg looked at Commander McTurk's red face, and laughed. "May you never be paler,"

he said, and sniffed at the heavy air. "Do you notice the smell of crushed marigolds has gone? That means we are out of the water stream brought down by White Post River, and are in plain salt sea again. Well, if we don't hurry up and get to the stink of Ju-ju River pretty quick, we shall catch that blessed tornado out here in the open.—Hey, you Brass-Pan, you tell dem boys dey bushmen. Dey no fit for canoe-boys. You tell dem hurry one-time, and if we lib for river, I fit for dash two cases of gin. Savvy, Brass-Pan? Two cases."

"Savvy plenty," said the head-man, and translated the news of this further votive offering. Whereupon the reeking negroes stabbed their paddles with fresh energy, and the heavy surf-boat fled still faster from the blackness which swept down towards her stern.

Bleached Madeira chairs stood on the floor-boards amidships for the two white men, and Commander McTurk sat in his and glared at Africa from puckered eyes. At last the United States Government seemed to have shaken off their distrust of him, and the Secretary of the Navy Board at Washington had entrusted him with a definite commission. It certainly was a secret commission, and one that had been refused by every officer who could wriggle out of acceptance. "If you win out," the official had said when the matter was talked through, "and do what's wanted, of course you won't be patted on the back publicly. Quite understand that? But the job will be marked up

to your credit, and I will see that the Navy Department does the right thing. You shall have a ship anyway, and when there's the next excuse you shall be posted. But if there's any trouble over the job, don't look beyond yourself for help. The United States will have to repudiate you anyway."

"I don't think," mused Commander McTurk, as he watched the furious surf smash along the beach, "that luck is very fair to me just now. I know men make luck; I've made it myself a hundred times; but handling the thick end of an Atlantic swell with a West African tornado thrown in, is outside my weight. There's White Post River and the quarter-deck of a United States ship dropping out of sight astern, and what there is ahead, even if we do contrive to run into this Ju-ju creek without getting swamped, Glory only knows."

"By Jove," said Brigg presently, "see that point we've just opened out? My quinine's beginning to act, by the way, and I can see three points quite distinctly. There's our river tucked in at the back. Lordy! what a bar! But it's better than the one we've left."

McTurk turned to the head-man. "Can you take your boat through into that creek?" he asked sharply.

"No savvy," said Brass-Pan.

"You plenty fit for make dem boat lib for river?" Brigg translated.

"Small-small fit," said Brass-Pan doubtfully.

"I dash you three boxes gin if we lib for river."

The Krooboy showed two rows of excellent teeth. "I fit for get dem gin," he chuckled, and gave further directions to his crew.

Again the uneasy waters around them grew beer-coloured, and again there came that acrid smell of crushed marigold so inseparable from some West African rivers. The surf-boat, as soon as she had rounded one of the flanking sand-spits, turned sharply at right angles to her former course, and stood boldly in towards the spouting waters of the bar. Behind them the tornado stood up in a tremendous wall of blackness, that bumped and grumbled with uneasy thunder. And with them always they carried the pungent aroma of sweating negro.

They were already in the roaring noise of the bar when Brigg shouted his last piece of advice. "If the boys jump, you jump too. If you don't you'll have the boat over on top of you, and probably get a broken thigh."

"All right," McTurk yelled back. "It isn't exactly the first time I've seen a surf-boat, but I never tackled as ugly-looking a river bar as this. Wup! but that was nearly over."

The surf-boat reared and plunged, and stood on its head and stood on its tail; the Krooboys paddled for naked life, and Brass-Pan at the steering-oar performed a miracle regularly every fifteen seconds; and all around them the beer-coloured water spouted and creamed and roared in its turmoil. There were two bars, it appeared—an outer and an inner; and when they were shot into the space between the two, water-logged and gasping, they stopped

the paddles for a moment to bale and draw a breath.

It was here that the tornado burst upon them with a rattle and a bang. The wind came in a blast that seemed solid as the end of a house; the rain and the spindrift in it beat them cruelly; they were chased by vivid lightning, and deafened by the continuous bellowing of the thunder; and before they very well knew how it happened, they had been blown bodily through or over the inner bar, and were thrown with other unconsidered raffle and wreckage into riparian mangroves.

Beneath them was obscene mud dotted with more obscene land-crabs; around were the swaying wire-like stems of the mangroves; and overhead the solid wind swept through the gloom like some titanic planing-machine. There was no more fight left in any of them; they were battered, gasping, breathless, dazed, deafened; and they cowered on the floor of the surf-boat, the whites sandwiched in amongst the blacks.

Then of a sudden the swept mangroves stood up again, swaying gently. The sun came out with cheerful smile, and got to work at thawing their chilled bodies. The roar dropped, and the heads bobbed up with an instinctive sigh of relief.

"And thus passes," said Brigg, "the West African tornado. I always like to picture the particular devil who drives these hurricanes as standing at an ordinary main-steam throttle, and taking a professional pride in jumping to full speed ahead and easing to a stop, both instantan-

eously.—I say," he giggled: "excuse me, but what the dickens is the matter with your hair?"

Commander McTurk lifted his helmet, and put a hand gingerly to his wig. It had blown off during the tornado, and to his furious annoyance he had put it on wrong side first."

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the Englishman.

"Mr. Brigg," the American rasped, "I'll break your infernal neck if you don't stop that row. I brought you along to render me certain services, which you have failed in so far. I did not bring you to criticise my toilet."

"Oh, all right," said Brigg cheerfully. "Don't get stuffy. With this quinine inside me I can see three wigs distinctly, and maybe I noticed the wrong one."

"I also object to your use of the word 'stuffy,' or to any other familiarities."

But here Brigg's temper gave way also. "If you don't like my neighbourhood or my manner, Captain McTurk, you've my full permission to go. I was promised some of your almighty dollars for services rendered, and I'd like to remind you I haven't seen the colour of them yet."

"You'll have to wait. My wad's at your beastly factory."

"I don't quite know what a wad is, but if it's something one could ram down the throat of an American eagle when it screams, I wish we had it here."

The last shred of Commander McTurk's temper went. "I'll teach you," he snarled, "to chuck

your nasty British sneers at anything American," and reached out his long, powerful arms, and gripped the Englishman with the quickness of a professional fighter.

But Brigg had been long on the Coast; his strength was sapped with quinine and malaria; and the American, feeling the want of fighting balance on the instant, eased his grip, and threw the man with contemptuous gentleness against the mass of the Krooboys. Then the game changed with suddenness. There were fourteen paddlers to the boat, and Brass-Pan made up the fifteen. They promptly proceeded to show their resentment in a practical manner. They belonged to the strongest race on earth, and when McTurk put in his sledge-hammer blows on their heads, he merely barked his own knuckles without inconveniencing them in the least. He was as much outclassed as Brigg had been, and when he went down to the floor-boards with most of the wind and sense jolted out of him, if there had been no interference, murder undoubtedly would have followed.

But Brigg was a white man, and followed the instincts of his colour. "Let him alone," he shouted. "My palaver. You let dem white man alone, you bushmen. I tell you dis not your palaver now. . . . Here, you, Captain McTurk, get up and congratulate yourself on having an unslit throat. Got your wits all there, eh? Good and well. Now, if you please, put your ridiculous wig on straight again, and either apologise or go to the devil."

"I'll not apologise to you at any rate," said McTurk furiously.

"Well," said Brigg, "I've offered you an alternative."

Commander McTurk straightened his dishevelled clothes. Then he looked at the interlacing mangroves which hazed away into solidity a bare score of yards from the boat, and looked also at the foul mud below them. He showed no hesitation. When he had made his person neat again, he deliberately stood up on the surf-boat's gunwale, and swung off amongst the wire-like branches, passing from one to another, and keeping well above the mud.

"Come back!" Brigg shouted, "and don't crawl about there like an overgrown ape. Come back here, and don't be a fool!"

"Thanks, but I'm full up on British hospitality."

"Then," snapped Brigg, "I hope you'll enjoy the fever which you'll get certainly, and the land-crabs which will start in to chop you before you peg out." And he continued to shout angry sarcasms and insults till the other man was out of sight and earshot.

Now, there were three things which made Commander John Kelly McTurk lose his temper, and cheap witticism about his flaxen wig was one of them. His rage had been genuine enough, but it was not altogether aimless. Always at the front of his mind he carried a memory of the commission—the secret commission—which had brought him to West Africa, and whilst he was wrangling with the Englishman in the surf-boat,

an idea had suddenly come to him by which even now it could be carried to a prosperous conclusion.

To pass through the unfathomable slime and mud of a mangrove swamp is a thing impossible; to pass over the top of it amongst the desperately close fabric of the branches, in a stew of heat, in a maze of mosquitoes, is a feat generally accounted hopeless for a white man. But in spite of his great height, Commander J. K. McTurk was a man of enormous strength and activity; and just then he was spurred by more than ordinary determination. He sweated, and he struggled, and he strained; he held on a course at right angles to the river, steering roughly by the sun; and on the edge of night came to the top of the tide-mark and the end of the mangroves.

But there is no twilight in the latitude of Ju-ju River, and the hot night snapped down like the shutting of a box. By a happy chance, the mangroves were not backed by bush—that dense West African bush that even machete-men can only cut through at the rate of a couple of miles a day. A savannah lay behind, and already yielded the mist-wreaths of early evening. The grass on it was five feet high, and here and there was an occasional ragged nut-palm, and through this country McTurk made a slow way, keeping always parallel to the river.

It was not very dark. The unwholesome phosphorescences of decay glowed here and there amongst the grass-stems, whilst in the great, vague night overhead heat-lightning blinked

quietly. One star alone was visible: a great flare hung low over the sea's horizon.

But after Commander McTurk had stared for a minute at this last, and wished much that he had a canvas and some oil colours on which to note down his impressions of it, he turned his back on sea and yellow star, and marched resolutely on, deeper and deeper into the most dangerous country in Africa. Insects bit him, and the mysterious night noises of the bush pinged and growled past his ear. The smell and the close heat would have unnerved a weaker man.

It was very little short of dawn when at last he hit upon a bush road, and presently came upon cultivated land. There was a hut, a sound enough thing of swish and wattle, and the smell of wood-smoke still lingered in the ashes of the cooking fire. Inside were mats, a figured gourd chop-bowl, and a couple of hoes; but it was evident that the farmer and his family slept in the security of his town house.

McTurk peered round the eaves of the hut, and found a slab of heavy wet cassava bread, and a square-faced gin-bottle filled with some sour palm wine. He made a doubtful breakfast from these, and left behind him twenty-five cents in United States currency as payment. Then he topped up with a rousing dose of Blue Shield Febrifuge pills, and took the most paddled road out of the farm.

Once more he wound through the bush, which now steamed under the morning sun, and then came upon more farms, and soon found himself

being stared at by curious blacks in the outskirts of Ju-ju Town itself. At first his observers were children and women; but presently the males began to come out from the huts; and these changed from husbandmen into warriors with a quickness which said little for the Pax Germanica.

"I say, daddy," remarked Commander McTurk to a burly savage who stopped his advance, "I'd give a trifle to know how you materialised that ferocious-looking spear of yours out of nothing. A second ago you'd a hoe in your hand, and now, hey presto! it's a spear. You're naked to the point of indecency, and so you couldn't very well have it concealed up your sleeve, conjuror fashion. But I want to know if you'll kindly make another quick change, and turn it into a wand of peace? Ah! would you?"

The black man snarled, uplifted his great right arm, and made a sudden lunge. Commander J. K. McTurk, with still more magic quickness, stepped aside, seized the arm, twisted it over his shoulder, and hove down upon it. The elbow-joint snapped with the noise of breaking faggots, and the man screamed like a child.

Commander McTurk settled the disorder of his clothes, picked up the spear and felt its balance, and then addressed the onlookers. "Now look here," he rasped: "I don't undertake to fight through the whole of this town, because I understand it's considerable big. But I'm an officer of the United States Navy, and I'm going to cut out the livers of the next sixteen able-bodied men who apply for attention. Any takers?"

Apparently there were not.

"Well," he said, "I'll not wait longer in this suburb. I've business at your Government House; and as I suppose you, sir, there, who owned this spear, consider you've a grievance against me, I'll take you right along to lay your complaint in the proper quarters. Now march."

The scowling black savage who nursed the bones of his broken elbow with his sound hand, understood the order by intuition. There was something about this tall strong white man that was beyond his former experience. The Germans who said they owned the country could command —did command, in fact, with much copiousness; but they were either too formal or too blustering to convince one that they could see their orders carried through. This present man, with the wrinkled red face, seemed somehow to carry a different flavour with him. He had broken the strongest arm in Africa, and, if his desires were not fulfilled, he was perfectly capable of breaking the strongest bull neck in Africa in his next moment of displeasure. So the savage mentioned that his name was Mn'John, and stated in pantomime his entire readiness to carry out all instructions.

"Well and good," said McTurk. "Show the way." And forthwith he marched forward through two rows of excited and dangerous natives, who glowered and stared, but forbore to touch him.

In Ju-ju Town itself there were few evidences that it had ever been occupied even temporarily by the Germans. Their corrugated iron Customs House still stood, but it was the residence of a

practising ju-ju priest, and was ringed round by a horrifying row of damp human skulls. The place reeked of sacrifice and savagery. It was not one white man in a thousand who could have gone even to the borders of the town without meeting disaster.

But the atmosphere which J. K. McTurk carried with him was a sufficient protection, even in these wild circumstances. His wounded guide led him on unfalteringly, and now and again threw a word of explanation to the more threatening groups; and at last they came to a squat square building of mud and wattle, which was protected at its angles by low square towers. From one of these towers peeped the water-jacket of a machine gun; from another there showed the chase of a German field-piece; and beside the gateway between them there lounged two naked sentries who nursed well-kept Männlicher rifles.

"Government House, evidently," commented the visitor; and to one of the sentries he added: "Here, you. Go tell the King that Commander J. K. McTurk of the United States Navy has come to visit him on a Special Service matter."

The sentry apparently had some English. "No savvy United States. Is it all-e-same German?"

"Not on your life. Way-up superior."

"Good as English?"

Commander McTurk's red face took on a deeper tint. "Don't you ever think of comparing them. The United States is the finest concern on earth."

"United States no fit for run steamahs on de Coast," said the sentry thoughtfully.

"That's an enduring fact. Your old Coast's a sickly place anyway, and I guess Yankee ship-owners know enough to stay in out of the wet."

The sentry was clearly impressed. "Dem true," he admitted. "Steamah-palaver damrot." And he added simply, "I lib for stokehold once mineself. Now you stay here. I fit for go say you come."

But whilst this parley had been going on outside the palace, a local vested interest had become alarmed. From the corrugated iron house in the square three ju-ju priests saw the visitor, and did not wait to diagnose his nationality. "All white men," so ran their creed, "are the enemies of ju-ju." So forth they came, fantastic in horrible garnishings, blowing lustily on great ivory horns.

Like leaves swept down before a gale, the clan gathered under the grilling sunlight of the square; and if the ju-ju priests had been men of action instead of men of explanatory speech, Commander McTurk would have been marked for sacrifice, and probably torture. But the chief ju-ju man saw just the chance for a popular and impassioned harangue, and that fatal gift of oratory saved the sailor. The secular arm intervened. His friend, the sentry, appeared again in the blackness of the mud doorway, and led him in amongst the domestic smells of the palace, and the crowd stayed yapping outside and made no attempt to follow. Evidently royalty in Ju-ju Town knew how to make itself respected, even

when its views were at difference with those of the Church.

"Now, my lad," said McTurk to his guide, "just you trot me right along to your old King, and here's a nice soft five-dollar bill for your pains."

"Dem King he lib for die tree week back. Sultana palaver lib. Dem Sultana say I bring you to her."

"My Glory!" muttered McTurk, "here's luck coming to meet me after all with both hands full. I bet two dollars and a half that's the woman I want. Just think: I shall carry out my commission without any further waiting, and I shall get a ship. Great Glory! to think of being done with these hole-and-corner jobs, and landing back once more in the United States Navy!"

The dark interior of the palace rustled with unseen life, and reeked with negroid odours. It was surprisingly large, and vastly squalid: a great piecemeal warren that could have tucked away two hundred men. Twice as he wound his way down tortuous passages Commander McTurk heard the click of a gun-lock close to his ear, as some fierce savage itched to shoot him. Once he was actually assaulted by three men, knife in hand, and warded off the blow of one by a buffet of his own most capable fist, whilst his guide calmly bayoneted another. The third man slipped away silently into the warm darkness.

With the exception of these incidents, he arrived at the audience-room without interruption, and the sentry passed him in with a friendly push on the shoulder. "Dem female," whispered

the sentry, "make herself Sultana. All-e-same King. Plenty-much-fine strong. You fit for do touch-hat palaver."

After the savagery and squalor of the palace, the audience-chamber itself came as a vast surprise. It was a courtyard really, but the mud walls were hung with silks, and a tent of silk overhead kept out the blaze of the African sun. There was a divan at one end, and on it a woman sat cross-legged, and her head bound and veiled after the Touareg fashion.

To her Commander McTurk, helmet in hand, advanced briskly, and made his best bow, and introduced himself with full naval formality. "I am wondering very keenly, your Majesty," he added at the conclusion of his speech, "as to whether you are the lady who formerly had an address up White Post River."

The ripple of a laugh came from behind the veil. "Had you come to offer her an alliance with the United States?"

"Well, your Majesty, I could hardly go so far as that at this stage of the interview. We heard there was a white lady up there who—well, who was making war."

"Committing the usual West African atrocities?"

Commander McTurk frowned. "One makes proper allowance for climate. The main question which—er—interested my Government was the report on the lady's colour."

"And you'd like me to take off this head-clothing right now, so that you can see for yourself?"

If" you would be so gracious. I have been looking forward to this moment for many a thousand miles."

"I'm afraid, Captain McTurk, that you must keep on looking for the present. Let me put instead an ordinary Yankee question: How do you like my city?"

Now, somehow Commander McTurk got the idea that he was being hoaxed. The lady behind the veil, be her colour what it might, spoke with such a surprisingly strong New English accent, and with such homely idiom, that the theory that she was what he had come so far to find, vanished in a flash. So he answered with some tartness that the city was a savage abomination, and that he was surprised at any woman who could speak good United States staying voluntarily within its boundaries.

And then, hey presto! there came a change over the scene. The lady stiffened, yes, indeed seemed fairly to bristle with wrath, and cried out in some barbaric tongue what was evidently an order for her guards: the silken walls of the chamber exuded spearmen; and in an instant Commander McTurk was ringed with a bristle of steel.

He had the wit not to resist, and the pride of race and Service saw to it that he did not wince, both of which points the lady noted, and nodded at approvingly; but on her tartly demanding a retraction, he replied that he had none to make.

She nodded to the weapons. "If I say a word, those spear-shafts will stand out of your skin like quills on a porcupine."

"I am sure," said McTurk, "that a lady of your wit will quite weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of such an action."

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "perhaps there is no immediate hurry about the matter, and at any rate I always have them at hand to attend to you if need be."

She cooed out another order, and when the men had gone she gave Commander McTurk some plain advice. "You had better understand that I am Sultana here by the best of all possible rights—the right of conquest. You may not appreciate West Africans, but I do. I dare not be anything short of supreme in this town, and yours is the only piece of criticism that I have not dealt with fatally."

"Does that meet the German view?"

"The Germans left here before I came. Even the old King, who is dead, could deal with them; and as I beat the King, why should I fear a few fever-scorched Germans?"

"And you do not mind fighting for black men against your own colour?"

The lady laughed behind her veil. "We will leave that colour question alone, and say that I fight for my own hand. Do you see nothing admirable in that, Captain McTurk? Here am I, a woman, and I have made myself absolute ruler of a million fighting men."

"We heard at Washington you were something pretty big; and you have evidently developed some since I left. I may take it, then, that you were the lady I was commissioned to call upon up White Post River?"

"How could I say that," she evaded, "without knowing the exact terms of your commission from the United States Government? But we will leave your Government alone just now. It is your own opinion as a man and a sailor that I ask for. Do you see nothing admirable in a conqueror?"

"I," said McTurk simply, "am an American citizen and a United States Naval officer first, last, and all the time. The advancement of my own country is the only thing that interests me in that way."

The lady threw up her head impatiently. "I almost fear that you are too narrow to be useful. But you may be turned yet, and in the meantime you undoubtedly have your points. Are you single, by the way?—not that it very much matters."

"Yes," said McTurk, "I am a bachelor," and unconsciously straightened his coat.

"Ah, well," said the lady coolly, "then you will probably hear without much shock that I am going to marry you. I have not had a husband so far, but since I took this town I have decided to try one. I have decided, too, that my husband shall be white and tall. I had some Germans in to look at, but fancied none of them. You, I think, will suit me. At any rate I shall try you. And now you have my permission to go."

The guards rearrived on the moment like some trick of machinery, and Commander John Kelly McTurk was escorted away from the audience-chamber before he could think of a reply.

He was given two rooms, a sentry, and a

courtyard to himself, and was left with food, tobacco, German champagne, and his thoughts; and like the old campaigner that he was, he used all of them whilst the opportunity remained. Around him the savage palace hummed with life; overhead the sun blazed like a kettle of molten brass; and in the doorway the naked sentry, Männlicher on knee, cleaned his teeth with a stick of fibrous wood.

When night fell, cool and starlit, he was once more summoned to the royal presence, and was asked in plain terms to commence a courtship. It was an operation in which previous practice had given Commander McTurk considerable skill, but here experience failed him. He was not frightened, he was not even awed; indeed, he was disposed to make the most of the present, to see what it might bring forth; but the bizarre circumstances of the case locked his tongue. The lady persistently withheld view of her face or hint at her colour, and speculation on these two vital points baulked all his might-have-been tender utterances. It would have been easier to pay court to an unknown charmer down the telephone. But as it was, he could not take his eyes off the lady's veil, and saw beneath it the menace of a thousand horrid possibilities.

The Sultana on her part, perhaps with small knowledge of the real thing, seemed well enough content with his halting efforts. "Go on," she said once, when he stopped; "I can do the governing here, and I can conquer fresh country, but I want to have a husband who can talk of things outside."

"If I knew more where your outside interests lay, I would go straight at them. For instance, I guess you came here from the States?"

"I guess not."

"I was judging from your God's-country accent."

"Well, John, I reckon I got that from the tutor who taught me. He had been an American missionary till my father took him."

"Took him what? Prisoner?"

The lady laughed. "You do want to know so much. We'll say my father had this good missionary come and stay with us, and I guess that before he died I had extracted all he had to teach. Are you proud of your wife's accomplishments?"

"I haven't got a wife at present," rasped McTurk, "and before I take one, I want to know——"

"La-la," she cooed. "There must be no case of what you want to know, dear John. You will hear just exactly what I choose to tell my consort. You say you have no wife at present: well, you know best about that, and I do not care. But I can guarantee that you will have one to-morrow morning. There, do not talk back, John. I should hate to have you whipped on the eve of our wedding. Hush, sweet one"—she gave a call—"again you see my attentive guards. Captain McTurk, you have my permission to go."

Commander McTurk raged to himself when he got back to his room. How dared this woman play with him, make a mock of him, as she

obviously was doing? And yet she intended to marry him: he was absolutely sure of that. There was a deadly something in her voice that told him that she would drive over anything that stood in the way of her wishes, and for the life of him he could not help admiring her for it. What a Queen she would make—with him as King—over a great West African territory joined to the North American Union!

But then there was the veil, and the thick lips and the black skin that might be beneath it. No, even for the United States he could not venture the length of marriage.

The hot night drew on, and the hum of the palace died away. The moon had sunk, and only a few rare stars sprinkled the black velvet overhead. Commander McTurk piled furniture together, and got to the top of the wall of his courtyard.

To his surprise he found himself on an outside wall; and at the foot of a grassy slope, not a hundred yards away, the river gleamed faintly between tree stems. The faint crushed marigold reek of the water came to him plainly when he smelt for it. He dropped down from the wall and ran swiftly to the waterside. So when at last he did find a clumsy cotton-wood dug-out, and shoved out into the sluggish stream, he had it in him to have cursed aloud in rage at having to leave so tantalising a problem behind him.

The way was not easy. Often the stream contracted, and great trees joined in arch overhead, so that all was blackness underneath; and time after time he got into side tributaries, and

had to paddle out of twisting *culs-de-sac*. Alligators inspected him, and barked the news of his white man's scent to other alligators across the way; the invisible rustling night creatures of the woods stared at him with luminous devil's eyes; invisible bats blew little draughts of air at his face and hands as they skimmed past on their business journeys; and over and through all was the heavy crushed-marigold scent of the river, that made him cough and spit and long for a whiff of the crisp sea breeze beyond.

Then, with a sudden spasm of chill, the long close night came to an end; the darkness thinned; the river bar showed on ahead, white and tumbling; and within five minutes a flare of sun hopped up lemon-yellow from behind a paling of nut palms, and it was staring day, and the heat was commencing to grow.

A hail came to his ears from some recess of the mangroves, and he dug in his paddle still more fiercely through fear of pursuit. But the hail was repeated over and over again,and it occurred to him that several voices were shouting his own name. He glanced round in the directon of the sound. Up a canal of the mangroves a surf-boat —a green-painted European-built surf-boat—was being driven towards him with lusty strokes from trident-headed paddles. The naked paddlers were keeping time to their swing with a sort of hail which ran, "Oh McTurk—Turk—Turk—Turk," and amidships, seated in one of the two Madeira chairs the boat contained, a white man waved to him with a battered pith helmet.

Commander McTurk eased his pace, and the

surf-boat shot up alongside. Brigg clapped on his head-gear, and held out a thin yellow hand.

"By gum, Captain," he said, "but it does me good to see you again. I've pictured you as decorating the Sultana's private crucifixion tree, and I've been telling myself it's all my fault. I'd no business to quarrel with you. You were fed up on those beastly Blue Shield Febrifuge pills, and didn't half know what you were saying, and I was so full of quinine I understood about six times more than what you meant. It's a grand country, the West Coast, anyway. Here, get into the surf-boat, and turn Noah's Ark adrift."

"Thanky: I don't mind if I do. She's an unwieldy brute to paddle. Hullo, Brass-Pan, you've torn off all the rim of that Derby hat of yours. You'll have to give it up for Sunday wear if you don't take more care of it."

"Have a good time up yonder?" Brigg asked, when the surf-boat was heading once more for the bar.

"Oh, quite amusing in its way."

"Find the Sultana all that could be desired? Keep up the end of the great United States?"

Commander McTurk turned round with a sudden frown. "Now, how in Glory did you know there was a Sultana? Have you had this up your sleeve all the time, or have you had the news 'phoned to you whilst I have been away?"

Brigg laughed. "Now don't you get mad, Captain, with me any more, because I'm not going to quarrel with you again. You make me

too plenty-much nervous when you run away on your own after a quarrel. No, nobody rang us up with the news. We've been hard at work for the most part digging the surf-boat out of those blessed mangroves. But I sent off Brass-Pan to forage for food, and he brought back news. Say, Brass-Pan, you tell dem Cappie what you hear when you lib for find chop."

The head-man shivered. "I lib for bush very careful. Dam-bad country by dis Ju-ju River. Roads stopped. Plenty ju-ju everywhere. Den I see a mammy what run away an' hide. She say she old King's wife. He lib for die. New King come from Touareg country, and make herself king, and say she Sultana. You savvy Sultana palaver?"

"Perfectly. What's the Sultana like? White or dusky?"

"Plenty-much fine red an' white lady," said Brass-Pan appreciatively. "I fit for got her photygraf."

"By Glory, now we're coming down to bed-rock facts. By Glory, Brass-Pan, I'd have given two dollars and a half for this twenty-four hours ago. You don't know what a trouble that woman's veil was to me. Here, hand over."

Brass-Pan from inside his singlet produced a parcel delicately folded in native cloth. Commander McTurk took it, and unwrapped the cover with a jumping heart. He saw before him a gaudy oleograph from the top of a chocolate box. It was merely the pretty face of a well-known actress, and in his rage he would have torn it in

pieces if with a sudden snatch Brass-Pan had not plucked it away.

"Now then, Captain," Brigg expostulated, "play the game. That's Brass-Pan's best ju-ju, that he'll say his nightly prayers to for the next six months. Besides, here we are just on the bar, and if you ruffle him, he'll upset us as sure as I'm just starting my every-other-morning fever."

"By Glory!" muttered Commander McTurk, "I wonder if she planted that chocolate-box picture so that I should get it. She's equal to it. By Glory I half wish I'd risked the veil, and married her."

Chapter VII

MARGHERITA PEARLS

Miss Bridget McTurk played the harp, not so much because she had any talent for music, but by reason of the fact that she possessed beautiful arms. Her harping was much on a par with her brother's painting: both invariably gave pain to the multitude.

Miss Bridget McTurk possessed a set of pearl ornaments bought by an ancestral McTurk in the Rue de la Paix in Paris in post-Empire days. An infinite number of seed pearls had gone to make up the designs, which were, to say the least of them, massive; and, after the custom of that day, the pearls had been drilled from end to end, and sewn on to a white mother-of-pearl foundation with white horsehair. In the time of the great Queen Victoria, our forerunners liked mass in their trinkets. The pearl bracelets which decorated Miss McTurk's beautiful arms were about the size of those larger handcuffs, professionally known as "irons," which are applied to the sturdy wrists of mutinous seamen.

The horsehair in these tremendous ornaments had grown decrepit with age, and in places the seed pearls had disappeared, and the white groundwork stood out in full view. But a minor

matter like that did not disturb the equanimity of Bridget McTurk. Neither was she upset when the yellow curls across her forehead became entangled in some part of the harp's mechanism, and uprooted from their moorings. This always happened at least once an evening when the harp was in action, and was looked forward to by appreciative audiences as the one bright spot in Miss McTurk's entertainment. But the lady herself did not mind: she felt herself that the arms were the thing.

It may be understood, then, that Commander John Kelly McTurk did not always look upon his elderly sister's accomplishments in the musical line, or the trinkets with which they were associated, with any degree of complacency. He was a man with a high pride of family, and a still higher pride of Service. The status of the United States naval officer he privately considered to be higher than that of kings, and he considered that their relatives should act up to this position. His sister agreed with him in this, but in carrying the sentiment into practical effect her execution was faulty.

In a duelling age Commander McTurk would have been involved in about two personal combats for every five times he took Bridget out to any social function. But as it was, he had to refrain from useless interference. Miss McTurk was thoroughly well satisfied with all she did. Moreover, she always overlooked the fact that her tall brother had seen his fortieth birthday, and persisted in regarding him as a child, whose

opinions on deportment might possibly be amusing, but certainly should have no weight with an experienced maiden like herself.

Still, it was through one of Miss Bridget's bracelets, no less, that he came in for that very interesting experience down at Margherita in the Caribbean, which was with so much difficulty kept out of the newspapers at the time.

The affair began down at Mr. Israel McMechie's palatial cottage in Newport, to which Miss Bridget McTurk brought her harp as though it had been included in her own invitation. A pendant of one of the bracelets got snarled up in the instrument's strings, and Mr. McMechie most gallantly extricated it. He took far longer than was necessary over the job, and Miss McTurk, who would flirt with any man living, openly encouraged him. So the pair of them were amused, and the rest of the large house-party were amused, and only Commander John Kelly McTurk secretly raged.

But the talk thereafter turned on pearls, and presently Commander McTurk, who in his disgust had gone alone to smoke outside, was fetched in again by an imperative message from his sister.

"J. K.," she said, "I've got the command for you."

"Yeth," said McMechie, waving an explanatory palm, "that's right, my boy. We have formed a thmall thyndicate whilst you have been away, and your thithter has thecured you the command. She inthithted on you having a big, fat commithion, too, in cathe of thuccess."

"What's that you're talking about?"

"Margherita pearls, my boy," said McMechie, and would have gone into details, but the rest clamoured for Bridget.

Miss McTurk, so they pointed out, had faithfully promised to play again, if her brother got the billet; and Miss McTurk bridled, and once more leaned her yellow fringe against the harp-strings.

It was from this initial impulse, then, that Commander McTurk, one blazing day in June, found himself slowing down a torpedo-boat destroyer off the island of Margherita. His first officer came up to him and handed him a letter. "I guess, captain, these'll be the sealed instructions you asked for. It's about time, I fancy, that we hauled down 'Old Glory,' or whatever you call it."

McTurk turned on the man with a blaze of fury. "I do call the Stars and Stripes 'Old Glory,' Mr. Stubbs, and you can take that from me officially. Furthermore, you may understand that any man on this packet that ever dares to skit at either it or me will be knocked overside by that." Commander McTurk exhibited a bunch of hard and bony knuckles at the end of an abnormally long arm, and his first officer regarded them with respectful interest.

"Very good, sir," said Stubbs. "If you give those as official orders, of course I'll see them entered up in the log."

At the end of his watch Stubbs retired below, and meeting the chief engineer, Mr. Neil Angus McTodd, in the alleyway, narrated to him the incident with suitable garnishing.

"Oh, vara humorous," said McTodd with a cackle of laughter. "Sairve the stuck-up Yankee right, Mr. Stubbs. Ye're a no-nation son-of-a-dog yersel', I ken fine, Mr. Stubbs, and so ye dinna see the full humour o' it. But I'd advise ye to no' try the same jape about our auld Red Duster, Mr. Stubbs, or I'll gie ye just one smack on the gob, and ye'll need fause teeth for the rest o' your days." And murmuring that the whiskey was inside the grand piano in the messroom, Mr. McTodd took himself off, repeating the words, "Humorous, vara humorous."

Stubbs stared after him. "I've shipped on some rum craft in my time," he muttered, "but this beats the band. I knew the old man would sing 'Give me liberty or give me death' if any one offered him half a chance; and I offered, and got the tune. But fancy old McWhiskey being drawn as well. Funny go!"

In the meanwhile, with his elbows on the chart-room table, Commander McTurk was reading the typewritten instructions of Mr. Israel McMechie, and the thousand tiny wrinkles that seamed his red face deepened with annoyance as he went on.

"This," he told himself, "that McMechie wants me to do is a cross between debt-collecting and piracy. It was all very well for them to call it treasure-hunting at Newport, but the pearls are no more McMechie's than they are Bridget's. I've a high mind to deliver the McMechie Ship-building Company's destroyer to the Venezuelan Government at La Guayra according to their

order, and then go back home by the mail-boat in the ordinary course. It hardly seems square to use a vessel, that anyway in a few days' time will belong to Venezuela, as a weapon to damage Venezuelan interests over there in Margherita. Of course, I know McMechie says that the Venezuelans are a pack of no-account robbers that don't deserve consideration, anyway; but——"

Commander McTurk held the envelope up to the light to make sure that it was empty before throwing it away, and his eye fell upon an opaque segment at one corner. He dived for this with his long thin fingers, and produced a triangular billet addressed in his sister's handwriting. It ran:

"*Dear J. K.,*

"*Now's your chance to get back on the Active List of the United States Navy. It's Mrs. Codrington who wants those pearls, not McMechie at all. Mrs. C. pulls all the Navy Board strings just now, and if McMechie tickles her, he fancies that the orders for those new cruisers will just soak into his shipyard without further trouble. My idea is that if the matter is properly brought before her notice—and you may trust your sharp sister to do the bringing—Mrs. C. will expend her gratitude on the man who actually lifts those pearls out of Margherita. So go ahead, boy, and you'll get your step and a ship before you're a month older, as sure as I am*

"*Your affectionate sister,*

"*Bridget McTurk.*"

Commander McTurk put a finger inside his yellow wig and scratched vexedly. "I just hate to use backstairs influence," he said to himself; "but everybody seems to do it just now, and the man who relies on plain merit alone gets left. I guess I've been too nice-fingered. Lucy Codrington, too, of all people!" He screwed up his face into a puzzled grin. "I wonder how I'd feel, married?" He went outside into the sunshine and gave a new course to the officer on the bridge.

"That's for Las Conchas in Margherita yonder," he explained. "We'll just run in for fresh water."

The variegated stinks of Las Conchas met them as they drew in between the horns of the bay, and by the time they had brought up to the anchorage the odour of decaying fish met them in solid blast. Time was when the island of Margherita was the centre of the pearl-fishing industry of the Caribbean Sea; but that was in the old days of the Spaniard, and Spain never did and never will know the beauty of close seasons. The banks to-day are barren of pearl oysters, and the men of Margherita work them for fish, which they dry in the scalding sunshine ashore, and turn into that odori[illegible]us delicacy known to commerce as "bacc[illegible]

The picturesque boats o[illegible]
on the blue water, and
ings of the town th[illegible]
greenery, offered [illegible]
delicious a pictu[illegible]
and Commande[illegible]

a permanent record of it upon canvas. But the reception which the place gave to the destroyer was sufficiently surprising to knock these desires for art very quickly away from his head.

Upon the littered beach there gathered knots of men who gesticulated violently. Flags were run up, Venezuelan for the most part, which were as often abruptly hauled down. Shots were discharged, and more than one bullet ping'd over the destroyer. And on an ancient ruin, which the glasses said was a fort, a ragged mob started to handle cannon that might well in their day have threatened Francis Drake.

Mr. Stubbs, who had finished his duties connected with the anchoring, left the foredeck and joined Commander McTurk on the bridge.

"Funny go, that ashore, sir," said Stubbs. "Looks to me as if war had broken out between Venezuela and the States since we left home."

McTurk rubbed his hands. "I wish I knew."

Mr. Stubbs, with an eloquent thumb, indicated the Stars and Stripes which flew from the poop staff. "If you struck the Banner of Liberty over there, sir, and saw what happened, one might get a hint." But McTurk glared at him with such a sudden ferocity that even Stubbs' impudence quailed, and he hastened to give a further [illegible]e. "Of course I'm not an American [illegible]t I'm a white man, and if you can get [illegible] of scrap against these South American [illegible]ount me in, down to the last toe-

[illegible]r was quite the latest thing [illegible] in fighting trim would have

been a craft that any officer could have taken pride in. But although she had her Whitehead torpedoes on board, they lacked their war heads; and although she carried her full complement of quickfirers and machine guns, she had not so much as a single round of shotted ammunition for any of them. A dozen rounds of blank for saluting purposes made up the whole of her thunder.

She was built for speed. Under forced draught Mr. Neil Angus McTodd could knock thirty-two-point-eight knots out of her with ease and certainty; but as a consequence, all her plates and frames and scantlings were cut down almost to danger point, and Commander McTurk watched the gunners in the ancient fort with a puckered eye. If these honeycombed carronades did not burst in the firing, one trundling round-shot from any of them might tap a boiler and blow his vessel sky-high.

Of course, in face of all this extraordinary demonstration, the most sensible thing would have been to turn tail and steam out to sea. Indeed, it was McTurk's plain duty to have done so, seeing that he was responsible for the destroyer's delivery to the hands of her purchasers in La Guayra roads. But the man found it a physical impossibility to give the necessary order. Here, legitimate or otherwise, was the chance of seeing service, and he leaped upon it as a starving hound leaps on meat.

He rasped out sharp orders, and the crew of the destroyer, a good deal to their own amazement, found themselves carrying these out at

the run. They were a crew of yard hands, for the most part skilled mechanics, firemen, and trimmers, whose place was in the engine-room or the stokehold. Of deck hands there were only enough to relieve wheel and lookout. But the fire of McTurk's leadership was infectious; and moreover, for the time being, Mr. N. A. McTodd had lent himself to the deck executive.

Mr. McTodd had instilled obedience and smartness amongst the black gang by the aid of a three-quarter-inch spanner during the run out, and the contour of this weapon still outlined itself through his jacket pocket. Commander McTurk's crisp "clear for action" was translated by the engineer into language more suitable for the mechanical mind.

"And if you swine cannae beat Mr. Stubbs and the things he calls sailors," added McTodd, "I'll disrate ye below, an' turn ye oot on deck to get sore throats an' half the wages. Now fight for your big pay, ye scum."

They grinned and set-to with extraordinary speed and nimbleness. Awnings were whisked away, deck-hamper went incontinently overside. Housings were ripped from the guns, and these traversed as though by mutual consent, till the black eyes in their muzzles concentrated on the ancient fort, and hung there unwinkingly.

On the bridge Commander McTurk had turned into a new man. The binoculars that he had used all the passage out had disappeared, and in their place, tucked under his left armpit, was that official bâton, the single-barrelled telescope. Here was the naval officer, dry and formal of

speech, spruce, stiff, and unbending. The men at station and at work along the destroyer's decks felt tingles run down their spinal marrows as they watched him.

It seemed that there was good eyesight amongst the ragged heroes in the dilapidated fort. They caught the metallic stare of the destroyer's guns, and hesitated in their task of preparation. They tried to work on, but the stare demoralised them; and presently, by ones and threes and fives, they discovered that the infantry was preferable to the artillery arm, and ran back to the town to re-enlist.

A dozen desperate fellows seemed inclined to hold out; but presently these disagreed amongst themselves. A shot was fired by one at another; and thereafter the twelve emerged from the fort, and ran across the strip of grilling beach for the shelter of the outlying houses of the town, with all the speed they could muster.

The fort was evacuated. As a matter of the most ordinary precaution it was best to see that it remained so, and Stubbs and a boat-load of volunteers pulled off to spike the guns.

As the other members of the destroyer's crew watched the boat row away, they were almost mutinous. An hour ago they had no thoughts beyond earning their wages by the ordinary schemes of peace, but here was the savour of war blowing across their nostrils, and they were swashbucklers at once.

Their mood jumped well, so it turned out, with Commander McTurk's need. Once Stubbs had started to spike those historical guns, events

marched quickly. A string of flags went up to a mast ashore, and blew out in patches of barbaric colour against a background of tropical greenery. Commander McTurk had to be his own yeoman of the signals, and the thousand tiny wrinkles in his red face deepened as he delved the meaning from the signal-book. He sent up the answering pennant, and the hoist ashore was changed for another, and so on till four hoists had given up their message. By that time Stubbs and his boat had returned, and Commander McTurk called aft his crew and made them a speech from the narrow quarterdeck.

"My lads," he said, "we do not hold the United States commission on this ship, worse luck, though the people ashore seem to think we carry it. That was the United States Consul that was signalling just now, and he asks us for a guard of armed marines. He says that he's got ladies there, white ladies, and this snuff-and-butter coloured town is in a state of revolution. Well, my lads, we have no marines to lend them, but I guess we can offer efficient substitutes."

He got no further than that. The crew's thin skin of discipline shredded away; they thought of the excitement ashore, and each man of them yelled and roared his wish to volunteer. Commander McTurk pulled up his long body into its most rigid stiffness. In the United States Navy he had been known as a martinet for discipline, and the outburst jarred him unspeakably. But there was that lack of commission to be faced, and for that reason he dared not ride these men too heavily.

He held up his hand for silence. "The trouble is we've neither arms nor uniform." He eyed disgustedly the line of engine-room overalls. "It would be flattery to say you look like a lot of pirates in get-up, and as for arms, we'll each have to take something heavy till we can help ourselves to better weapons ashore. So the men I want with me as my boat's crew are the twelve men on board who are the biggest toughs in a scrap, and I leave you to choose out which they are amongst yourselves."

The appearance and armament of that boat's crew when at last they did set off was sufficiently striking. There were no two of them either clad or armed alike. For weapons they had iron bars, ratchet drills, monkey wrenches; Stroke Oar took an old favourite belaying-pin; Commander McTurk alone wore a recognised uniform, and carried a sword at his hip.

The water front at Las Conchas was deserted as they left the destroyer, but grew populous as they drew into more intimate sight. The houses exuded men in sun-bleached pinks and blues, and by the time the boat had rounded-to, and had her stern driven in amongst the fish-litter on the beach, there must have been an audience of five hundred, armed, every man of them, in full revolutionary panoply. And now was the moment for nerve. Leaderless mobs are notoriously fickle and unstable; and a lift of the finger, wrongly interpreted, may easily mean massacre. But Commander McTurk stepped ashore with a brazen confidence, and his men strode after him with an air of owning the island.

It was only when he commenced to march up through the houses that the matter of dislike grew to a roar of open hatred.

"By Glory!" said McTurk to his men, "but it seems to be a very unpopular fellow we've come to protect. Mr. McTodd, would you kindly mind taking the place of danger, and forming yourself into a rearguard?"

"Sairtainly," said the engineer; "but man, captain, do you no' think a strategic move to yon grog-shop to starboard there would be recuperating before we go further? We can regard it as an enemy's country, and no' pay——"

"Silence in the ranks there," rasped McTurk. "Quick march."

He had taken the bearings of the Consulate flagstaff from the seaward, and had not to ask a direction, and so presently, with an angry and threatening rabble buzzing round them, they reached the building, and looked in vain for that representation of the American eagle which marks a Consulate.

The place had plainly passed through troublous times, and was frankly fortified. In Spanish fashion, the windows for the most part gave on to an internal courtyard; but there were two which looked upon the street, and these and the door had been smashed away and had been replaced by furniture and bedding. The pink plaster round these windows and the doorway was pocked with bullet splashes, and the rifle barrels which poked out through the barricades, hinted that the attack had been warmly replied to.

A bullet from the house *whip-whipped* over

Commander McTurk's head as he advanced, but he neither winced nor halted, and presently found himself in the ruined doorway asking for admittance.

A gabble of Venezuelan Spanish replied to him.

"By Glory!" said McTurk, "speak plain United States, and quit that jabber. Now just open civilly, or I shall come in otherwise. You said you wanted help, and I came here in reply to your signals. If the representative of my country can't keep his end up in this doghole of an island, I'm the man that's going to do it for him."

"My dear J. K.," laughed a voice from within, "please don't get annoyed. Speaking for myself, I'm delighted to see you."

Commander McTurk winced as though he had been shot. "Mrs. Codrington!" he gasped.

"Yes, it is rather a surprise, I suppose. But do climb in over the barricade, or those horrid wretches will begin to shoot again."

And that this advice was sound they soon had very clear demonstration. The escorting mob had so far pelted them with nothing more deadly than jeers and groans, but the sight of this parley seemed for one reason or another to arouse them into a perfect frenzy of hate. They swept up to close quarters in a solid wave of knife-armed humanity, and battle began from simultaneous desire. From the house behind, the rifles began to spit viciously into the brown of the mob, and McTurk, who had been enjoying unfettered swordplay, was brought to his senses as officer-

in-command by the sting of powder on the back of his cheek.

It was madness to stay there in the open, anyway. Even if with backs to the wall they could stave off the huge weight of the mob and its weapons, they were bound, sooner or later, to get in the way of the bullets of their doubtful friends behind. So Commander McTurk got his own fighting madness in hand, and gave the nod to retreat over the barricade of the doorway.

But it is one thing to let undisciplined men warm up to savagery, and quite another to whip them off from a fight; and the wild whirling fury went on.

"Get into that house, you mutinous dogs!" shouted McTurk.

"Be damned!" retorted the chief engineer for self and friends. "Man, ha' ye no more manners than to stop a fight like this?" And the engine-room tools crashed into the opposing faces with grim, relentless energy.

But, one by one, the Venezuelan knives got home, and as the hot blood leaked out, so one by one the boat's crew remembered orders and climbed in over the barricades of the doorway, to swear and drip in the cool gloom beyond, and stanch as best they could the ugly gashes.

Commander McTurk, with his great height, his enormous reach, and his unexpected strength, was a splendid man in such a close melée as this, and Mr. Neil Angus McTodd, from the experience gained in the numberless unauthorised fights of a misspent life, was his worthy peer. But when the last member of the boat's crew, scared at a rifle-

shot from behind that knocked off his hat, tumbled in over the barricade, then the mob made an irresistible rush, and by sheer weight of numbers threw the pair of them in after their followers.

There was no attempt to follow. With a fine inconsequence, the rabble, having driven them in, invited them to come out again and be killed; and presently, having little stomach to storm so strong a fortress, the attackers drew off and indulged themselves in fervid oratory round the corner. By that time Commander McTurk and his chief engineer had ceased panting from their exertions, and looked upon one another with a new respect.

"You're a good man," said the American.

"Ye're no less yersel'," admitted the Scot. "But man, captain, it's a thirsty job, fighting. I make no doubt there's some one here just aching to offer hospitality, and with your leave I'll just go and find his bottle before it's wasted on the less desairving." And at that point there descended upon them no less a person than Mrs. Codrington herself.

The engineer took himself off on his errand, and McTurk and the lady faced one another in open embarrassment.

It was the sailor who first found his tongue. "I'm sure you will excuse me for the moment," he said. "I must go and find our Consul and arrange with him what is to be done next."

"I'm afraid you won't get him."

"What's that? Has he been killed? Or is he merely wounded? Pardon me, but I must go and see into this at once."

"I don't think it's very polite of you to want to hurry away like that, J. K., and I hope you won't think it forward of me when I say that I'm the nearest approach to a United States Consul there is in Las Conchas."

"You! You mean you're his wife or something? You aren't married again, by any chance?"

"Now, my dear J. K., don't be brutal. Of course I'm not married again." She glanced up at him from under her eyelashes. "I thought we had an understanding on that matter?"

Commander McTurk ignored the suggestion. He was very much the naval officer for the moment, with no leisure to think of other things.

"I must see," he repeated, "the man who hoisted those signals that brought me here."

Mrs. Codrington put a finger to her lips and curtsied low. "Please, Captain McTurk, I hoisted them."

"Then isn't there a United States Consul here at all?"

"You very dull man, of course there isn't."

"But how dare you do it?"

"How dare I pretend to mistake your destroyer for a United States man-o'-war, when I knew perfectly well she wasn't? Well, you see, Bridget, bless her heart, told me all about your trip, and I guessed it was you, and I was scared to death here, and I wanted you to come in and take me off."

"But couldn't you have said that plainly?"

"Let go my hand, J.K. You need not pretend to be fond of me. No, I couldn't send the

message in any other way. Do you think I'm the only person in Margherita who can read a signal-book? The fat would have been finely in the fire if I'd brought you ashore on a private venture. But you needn't rub it in so hard that you just hate to have come to do a creature like me any service."

McTurk laughed easily. "You don't think that, Lucy, or you wouldn't say it." He gave her waist a most affectionate squeeze.

"Well," said Mrs. Codrington, "we'll leave that alone for the time being, and I'd better tell you where you are. I suppose you know they're revoluting here?"

"I guessed that they might be."

"It's true enough. Half the people of Margherita are discontented with the present Government, and in fact with Venezuela generally, and they want to join up with some other state—Colombia, I think it is, or else Nicaragua, but I forget exactly which."

"Interesting of them."

"Yes, isn't it? Well, the leader of the revolutionary party was called De Quetto, and you're in his house, and helping the cause at the present moment."

"The deuce I am! And may I ask, Lucy, how long you have been dabbling in this branch of politics?"

Mrs. Codrington consulted a bracelet-watch. "About eighteen and a half hours. I was dragged into them by force of circumstances."

"I imagined you to be in Washington."

"Of course you did, and in Washington I

should have been, if either you or Bridget or that horrid McMechie had not decided that pearls were good for me, and that I couldn't get them myself. So I just raced you here in a navy despatch-boat that was going on to La Guayra, anyway."

"So you're after the Margherita pearls, are you, Lucy?"

"Well, you know yourself I like pearls, and there's always a glamour about hidden treasure, somehow."

"Have you got them?"

But at this point Mrs. Codrington's nerves showed signs of giving way. "No, I haven't. Oh, J. K.," she said, "it was awful. They began fighting less than an hour after the despatch-boat had steamed away, and there were dead men and wounded men about the streets everywhere. De Quetto saw me and brought me in here. We had met in Washington once. He was head of the Separatist party here, and now he's shot, and the rest of them are all as jealous as cats, and—I say, J. K., don't laugh when I tell you——"

"They've made you president, or dictator, or whatever it is?"

"That's exactly it."

"Of course, I'll be your consort when you give the word. I suppose they've got a padre on the island somewhere. But honestly, I'd think you'd queen it better in Washington than here. And I bet two dollars and a half you're sorry you ever left there."

But this was more than Mrs. Codrington would admit. She got up from McTurk's knee, where

somehow or other she found herself seated, and faced him steadily.

"I must get those pearls before I go."

And here it was Commander McTurk's turn to show annoyance. Over these same pearls he had expended time, thought, and risk, and he had a distinct interest in them himself. "I'll just bet you thirty cents, cold cash, Lucy, that you don't get them."

"I'll take that bet," she said, and there they were interrupted.

A solemn and slightly unsteady McTodd walked into the room, and stood for a moment regarding them. He hiccoughed once and apologised, and then: "Capt'n," said he, "I've come to bid ye to the feast. It's aguardiente—and any one can see I am sober by me pronunciation of a worrd like yon—aguardiente o' a fine powerful brand."

"You drunken hog," shouted McTurk, "get out!"

"In a meenute, in a meenute. If ye dinna like the cordial invitation, there's all the more for the hands and me. But man, captain, there's a vera humorous circumstance I want to tell ye aboot. It was at a concert once in Brooklyn in aid of a Sailors' Orphan something or other—a very meritorious cause, and your sister, Miss Bridget McTurk, was a pairformer. I mind a harp was her instrument, and man, once when she laid her heid against the change-speed gear, her hair—oh, it was vera humorous—her front hair——"

"Out of this room, you dissolute mechanic!" McTurk thundered; and before the Scot, fine fighting man though he was, could resist, he was

whirled out through the door, and thrown into a heap in the inner courtyard, where he dropped incontinently to sleep.

Now, it is not given to the United States naval officer to come into immediate touch with the ways and feelings of a South American revolutionist without preliminary practice. The man from the north considers the southerner unscrupulous and unsportsmanlike, and in turn the man from the south hates the northerner for his calmness and his unvarying success. Commander McTurk called a meeting of the defenders of the Casa de Quetto, heard their statement, and in return was scathing in his condemnation of all their aims and ways. He knew that they still took the destroyer in the bay for a United States ship, and he did not disabuse them of this belief. Even if he was not on the active list of the Navy, it gave him infinite gratification at a moment like this even to be mistaken for one who held that tremendous position. And he rasped out his decisions about their local matters with a fine confidence, and gave them to understand that all he said would be backed up forthwith by the President of the United States.

"There's going to be an enlargement of the Monroe doctrine," said Commander McTurk. "We don't intend to allow you people down here to be interfered with by Europeans, but we're going to police you into decent order ourselves. And the United States is not going to allow Mrs. Codrington, who is a United States citizen, to be your president. So you'd better chuck that idea."

The men in the room watched him with eyes that twinkled between hate and scare. Any one of them would have loved to assassinate him, but no one cared to make a move. There was an air of reliance and capability about the man that was very daunting.

So they accepted his ruling with bows and gesticulations, and then McTurk went back to Mrs. Codrington, to ask her to move there and then to the destroyer, which they could see from the roof as she danced with her shadow on the dark blue waters of the bay. But here he met with a flat refusal. Mrs. Codrington had come to Margherita for pearls, and the pearls she was going to get before she left the island. No, she was much obliged to J. K. McTurk, but she did not require his services in the matter. Quite so: she admitted that he had put in at the island expressly to get these same pearls. But at whose request? Not hers. If he looked at the matter calmly and without warmth, he must admit that he had thrust himself into the business entirely without her invitation, anyway. And on this edifying point they wrangled till Mrs. Codrington went away to her own room, and shut the door behind her with more vehemence than was perhaps absolutely needful.

But if Commander McTurk was sore at this treatment, he was by no means prepared to give in. On the contrary, Mrs. Codrington's opposition only made him all the more keen on carrying out his original programme. In her present mood she was quite equal to making an expedition to the cache herself and alone. He could

quite imagine her slipping away to the place surreptitiously during the night, with the hopes of flaunting the pearls before him in the morning. And he froze with horror to think of the risks she would run, if once she did get away without escort outside the house.

He wrestled with a dozen schemes between then and nightfall, and the Casa de Quetto hummed with conspiracy, and the town of Las Conchas around it fired shots and yelled and screamed, and carried out the whole programme of Latin-Indian revolution. But when midnight rang out from the carillon in the cathedral tower, he went out and waked his engineer, and put the case to him in plain words.

"Man," said McTodd, "ye've as much invention as I have mysel', and let me tell ye I was intended for the meenistry before I drifted to Clydebank, and from there to sea and to the kind o' company I find mysel' in now. My whiskers! captain, but it's a fair harlequinade ye're asking for. Ye may ease your mind consairning the lady: I'll keep her so entertained that she'll no' want to leave the house."

"Well, I know I can trust you."

"Ye can. Captain McTurk, ye're treating me in the right way. My father was Free Kirk Meenister at Ballindrochater, and the most respected man in Scotland."

Commander John Kelly McTurk slipped out into the night with the quietness of a tall black shadow. The town of Las Conchas still seethed with unrest, but the roads he took were for the most part deserted, and the wide-leafed hat and

the black Spanish cloak which he had borrowed made him look so much like a stage conspirator that there was nothing except his great height to distinguish him from the rest of the populace. He carried no revolver, mainly because he was a shocking bad shot, but a regulation navy sword rubbed comfortingly against his left thigh, and he had occasion to use it twice during those early morning hours, before he was permitted to dig up the buried pearls which he had come so far to touch.

I have never been able to find out from him more than a fragmentary history of that night.

Commander McTurk had a narrow escape from being shot, when with the first flush of dawn he returned to the house of the late Señor de Quetto. A demonstration was being made against the house, and the bullets were flying freely; indeed, as some repayment, probably, for his behaviour to the heads of the Separatist party, two shots were deliberately fired at him from the windows; but the aim was as evil as the intention, and by a streak of luck he came in unscratched. But his pocket bulged satisfactorily with something that he had risked his life to get, and he knocked at Mrs. Codrington's door with a cheerful mind.

She opened and looked at him with a face white and drawn. "It's been a terrible night, J. K."

"Oh," he said lightly, "I don't believe there's been any real danger."

"I thought, at least, you would come to look after me."

"I couldn't. I was busy elsewhere. But at least you will grant that I saw you were efficiently guarded."

"I will grant nothing of the kind. Why, they were fighting and cursing and shooting outside my very door. I heard that Scotch engineer's voice."

"Ah, Mr. McTodd. I left him to do his best for you. Who was he fighting?"

"I couldn't tell. They must have come on each time in silence. He did all the talking and shouting and replying to himself."

"Is he hurt?"

"He said not. I wanted to come out and see, but he would not let me. He said"—she shuddered—"that if I did, I should look upon things he would prefer should not meet my eye. Is there—is there much blood about?"

Naturally there was not, as Mr McTodd's had been a one-man entertainment, and his fusillade had drawn nothing more fluid than plaster; but the decent gloom of early morning hid the passage, and Mrs. Codrington clung to Commander McTurk's arm, thoroughly shaken, and quite open to do as she was told.

So the order was given to evacuate Las Conchas without any further delay, and the boat's crew, all of them very sore and stiff, made ready to march down to the waterside. They were armed now with far more deadly weapons than they had started with, and they looked so keenly anxious to use them, and so savage generally, that (seeing that they offered of their own free will to go away) the inhabitants of the

place considered that they were exactly the type of men that it is best to leave alone.

So down they all came through the fish-litter to the water's edge, launched their boat, and pulled out through the picturesque fishing-craft to where the destroyer rolled lazily to her anchors over the blue harbour swells.

"And now, Lucy," said Commander McTurk, as he helped Mrs. Codrington in over the rail, "I'll trouble you for that thirty cents."

"What! you've got the pearls?"

He showed her a small copper box green with verdigris, and laughed. "I'm sure you'll be deadly disappointed, but here they are, at any rate, and please pay up that bet."

Mrs. Codrington opened the lid and gave a little gasp. "But these dull brown things are not pearls. Yes, they are, though. Why, J. K., what have you done with them? They're spoiled."

"Don't ask me. Bridget's the expert on pearls. But for a guess, I should say they have been kept in the dark and not worn for two hundred and eighty years—that's the date the document gave, if you will remember—and they've lost all colour and become perfectly valueless."

"But, of course, you did not guess that till you saw them," she said musingly.

"Not I. I was told about the contents of that copper box, sweetheart, and I heard you wanted them, and so there they are. And please I want that thirty cents."

"You shan't have it. I bet I should get the

pearls, and I have got them. See that, John Kelly McTurk? I shan't pay a red. But if you'll come inside that charthouse where all these shabby sailormen of yours don't have us in view, I'll give you a kiss that'll surprise you."

"By Glory!" said Commander McTurk. "Come along, Lucy."

Chapter VIII

TAKING WATER

There is not the least doubt that the German Waterworks Company in Santa Barbara had been very badly treated. In effect the Venezuelan Government had said: "We covet your goods, and will proceed to take them. Clear out." And in reply Berlin had threatened, the Emperor had made a patriotic speech at a swearing-in of recruits, and the German second-class cruiser *Fürst Eitel* had demonstrated along the Venezuelan seaboard. The Big Power at Washington had likewise taken off its coat so as to have free action in case it was necessary to step in and umpire.

Santa Barbara is a city of much domestic history. In early days it was one of the first European settlements on the Spanish Main; it built a great cathedral in amber-coloured stone, and set up a branch office of the Holy Inquisition; and it enjoyed the distinction of being twice harried by Sir Francis Drake. In more modern times, under the Venezuelan régime, by the help of revolution, earthquakes, and political intrigue generally, it has contrived to bring local life and property to a pitch of insecurity greater than can be found anywhere else in all South America.

The Santa Barbara river—which is just a mountain stream—runs through the city from south to north, and until five years ago the citizens used this stream with a fine impartiality to wash in, to drink from, and to carry away their refuse. When an intelligent German, who had nearly died of Santa Barbara typhoid, thought out a water scheme, they listened to him with respect and interest; and when later he arrived with large German capitalists in his train, the City Fathers extracted all they could get in the way of bribes, and permitted the waterworks to be constructed without further interference.

It never occurred to the citizens of Santa Barbara that their new water supply was a luxury, far less a necessity; and when subsequently the question of paying a water-rate arose, they merely waved a certain number of yellow cigarette-stained fingers and laughed. The idea of paying any one—especially Germans—for water, was too comic.

Now a good deal has been written about the sanity of people who lend out their money in South America with any idea of seeing a regular and decent return therefrom; but Herr Gustav von Ralle, who was the founder of, and had made himself chief stockholder in, this Santa Barbara waterworks scheme, was a man with strong instincts of self-preservation. He had been born and brought up in Berlin; he had spent the years between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine in Chicago; and he was well in touch with those larger financial concerns which can pull the leading-reins of Governments all the

civilised world over. When the city of Santa Barbara refused to pay its water-rates, the stock of the water company dropped on the Stock Exchanges, and dropped and dropped, till at length it landed in the gutter with those bankrupt concerns whose shares are used only as gambling counters. At this price von Ralle steadily bought; and it was not until he had collected 55 per cent. of the whole of the scrip into his own safe, that he pulled those political strings which sent the German second-class cruiser *Fürst Eitel* to demonstrate against the coast towns of Venezuela.

The Venezuelan Navy was at the moment a neglectable quantity, but high hopes were placed on an up-to-date torpedo-boat destroyer purchased from the McMechie Shipbuilding Company in the United States, and now on its way out to La Guayra under the charge of one J. K. McTurk, Commander U.S.N. (retired). The Venezuelan Government had christened the destroyer *Blanco* in advance of her arrival, and were a good deal perturbed at hearing (*viâ* New York, Paris, and London) that this enterprising vessel had created a "strained relationship" with Germany already.

What made the matter all the more annoying was a knowledge that the *Blanco* had set off with only a shipyard crew, that she had no ammunition on board, and even lacked war-heads to her torpedoes. Yet of certain facts reported about her there was not an atom of doubt: she had steamed into the roadstead of Santa Barbara, and found there the *Fürst Eitel* shaking a mailed fist; she had held intercourse with this vessel at first

in the way of civility, and had come to anchor within a cable's length of her; and then of a sudden she had trained torpedo-tubes on her beam, and had bidden her steam out to sea or be blown up. The *Fürst Eitel* had gone her way, snarling threats, and the *Blanco* had coaled up from a hulk and steamed off to an unknown destination. And here came in the astonishing part of the whole performance: the destroyer had not yet been transferred to the Venezuelan flag, and in point of fact had not even been paid for. She was technically a merchant vessel on the United States register.

Now, tidings of what had been going on had oozed over to New York, and a certain Semitic gentleman, who carried the very Scottish name of McMechie, was kept thereby waving the palms of dismay. To every cable station on the shores of the Caribbean Sea he sent urgent messages, entreating and imploring Commander John Kelly McTurk to "*deliver vessel at destination without further delay, and collect price as per arrangement.*" And sometimes he so far forgot himself as to add threats. But Commander McTurk on his part guessed that such messages would be chasing him, and avoided all spots where submarine cables landed, as though they had been centres of bubonic plague.

It remained for one of the yellow newspapers to start a half-laughing sensation with the title, "Is the gallant Commander trying to be a pirate, or is he merely eloping with Mrs. Codrington?"

A copy of this print, mailed by Miss Bridget McTurk, reached the *Blanco* by devious ways;

and J. K. McTurk ripped it open, read it with a purpling cheek, and thrust it with furious gesture before a lady who sat at the other side of the narrow cabin table. "There," he said, "just read it for yourself, Lucy. This must be stopped at once. I shall send ashore to bring off a padre."

"I would, of course, if I were you, if you think it will cool you. But what exactly for? To confess to?"

"To marry me to Lucy Codrington, widow."

"Ah! but there you are going ahead too fast. It takes two to agree to a contract of that kind, and I'm not one of them. I'm very fond of you, J. K.; we're quite agreed upon that point; but I'm not going to marry you. At least, not yet."

"But think where you are."

"'Once aboard the lugger, and the girl is mine,'" quoted Mrs. Codrington in tuneful recitative. "No, no. That classical incident occurred long, long ago, and history does not always repeat itself accurately. Besides, a torpedo-boat destroyer isn't a lugger, anyway, and moreover, your chief engineer Mr. McTodd is a most efficient chaperon. You'll have noticed how he breaks in upon our *têtes-à-tête* on every possible and impossible opportunity."

Commander McTurk laughed in spite of his annoyance. "It's been pretty obvious, confound his impudence,"

"Then," said Mrs. Codrington in airy conclusion, "don't you worry about me, J. K."

"But I do worry. We've brought off a gorgeous bluff against the *Fürst Eitel* once, but we can't do that a second time. They'll know

who we are by this, and how harmless we are, and how the whole world is laughing at them for their climb down. If they could catch us now, we should be in for something pretty degrading, and by Glory! I'm not going to risk taking sauce from those starched, stuck-up Dutchmen for any thing you could name."

Mrs. Codrington looked up and addressed the skylight. "And not five minutes ago this great tall man was vowing me eternal service!"

"Besides," Commander McTurk added vexedly, "what you want is ridiculous. This von Ralle fellow has got control of the Santa Barbara waterworks, and you'll never make him let go as long as the world stands. It's no use crying for the moon, Lucy."

Mrs. Codrington lowered her gaze and looked at him steadily, and till then McTurk had never fully realised how much strength and determination could, upon occasion, peep out from the lady's very pretty face. She said nothing, but he looked her over, and read her reply plainly enough. He threw up his hand with a rather harassed laugh. "Well, anyway, of course I'll do my best to help, but I bet you two dollars and a half you don't get it."

"Get which? The moon or the waterworks?"

"Either or both."

"Done with you, J. K.," said she; and there McTodd interrupted them.

"I thought I'd just tell ye, Capt'n, there's the Dutchman coming in from the east'ard, and from the sinful way he's burning best Welsh, he seems in a hurry."

"Then we must get away from here at once You have steam up?"

"Aye, I've steam. Mon, I carried oot your orders there to the foot of the letter, as we say in France. But the humorous thing is that for the moment we can no' use it. That busy-minded son-of-a-whisker, my second, has amused himself during my watch below with getting the low-press cylinder heid off from the starboard engine, and it's a four hours' job to repack and refit it at the very least. Ye see there was a blowing joint——"

But Commander McTurk waited for no more. He darted up through the companion and got on deck. The sun glared down upon the anchorage with breathless heat; the shore behind rose up in a steep wall of unbroken greenery; and over the dark blue saucer edge of the horizon, the *Fürst Eitel* had already lifted her round military tops.

On the destroyer smoke trickled vertically from two of her stacks, and collected into a hazy cauliflower overhead, and from her poopstaff the stars and stripes hung in limp moveless folds. Commander McTurk let his eyes rest on his country's flag, and had it in him to have groaned aloud. He knew the temper of the officers on the German cruiser. He had heartily disliked their stiff unbending attitude even when they had met him first of all on the plane of civility; and now, after the quarrel in which he had bluffed them, and so held them up to ridicule, he was sure they would be coldly merciless in any indignities they could see their way to putting either on him or his flag.

But Commander John Kelly McTurk was one of those fortunate men whose resourcefulness is never so great as in moments of violent stress. He looked at the oncoming cruiser, and he looked at the desolate sea, and within sixteen seconds he had formed his plan and was busily carrying it out into detail.

* * * * *

The second-class cruiser *Fürst Eitel* bustled up to within two hundred yards of the *Blanco*, looking extremely German and extremely aggressive. She had been badly scored off by Commander McTurk once, and did not propose to repeat the experience. She had been held up to the delighted ridicule of the civilised world, and she had caused a Very Great Personage in Berlin to dance with impotent rage. The Great Personage had sent her captain a telegram to express his views, and they were lurid views. He was a personage much addicted to views and telegrams. And Captain Schunk (as Commander McTurk was not available) had vented the first oozings of his spleen on a certain Herr Gustav von Ralle, who happened to be on the *Fürst Eitel* as a passenger.

Captain Schunk, as became his Service, had the most profound contempt for civilians, and maybe he had been a trifle misled by the pacific attitude which von Ralle had shown heretofore. The cruiser's officers (as became their Service) had endured him amongst them, but let him understand he was a pariah, and von Ralle had put up with what treatment he received with the utmost placidity, but saw to it that the

cruiser fulfilled her mission of harassing Venezuela.

But when suddenly, in response to a peremptory summons, he was dragged before a furious captain, who exploded insults and brandished a telegram, why, then the meekness of Herr von Ralle dropped away from him. He waited till the frantic officer paused for want of breath, and then he also produced a telegram.

The portly Schunk read it with white fury. It was addressed to "*Herr von Ralle on board* Fürst Eitel. *Take no notice*," it advised, "*of cable which will arrive from our advertising agent. Continue Waterworks policy agreed upon. Cable us immediately if* Fürst Eitel *Captain intractable, and we will have him replaced*,"—and then there followed a name, not of a trading company or of a financial firm, but of a man in the inner councils of the German Government.

"Now," said von Ralle, "the German Navy from my point of view exists not for the benefit of its officers, but for the benefit of German commerce. You may continue to be rude to me if it amuses you: I really don't care about that, one way or the other; but when you intend to neglect the work for which you were sent out here, I wish you would give me warning, so that I may make my arrangements. As I have had the honour to inform you, it is practically Mrs. Codrington who is setting the German control of the Santa Barbara waterworks at defiance. I gave you notice that Mrs. Codrington was on the *Blanco*, and you tried to arrest her, and—er—failed. I now give you further notice

that she is still on the *Blanco*, and there is a charge against her of conspiracy, and the Venezuelan Government has promised to give her up. If we can get Mrs. Codrington off the spot for six months whilst she stands her trial in Berlin, the waterworks matter will be concluded here, however the law sees fit to deal with Mrs. Codrington."

"But," objected Captain Schunk, "if the *Blanco* should fly the American flag, and she refuses to give Mrs. Codrington up—which is likely—I cannot search her by force. That would mean war with the United States, and though our Navy would be only too pleased to give the infernal Yankees a drubbing, I have specific orders from Berlin not to provoke trouble."

"The *Blanco*," von Ralle assured him, "is Venezuelan. Built she was in America, I grant you, by that scoundrel McMechie, but bought she has been by these Venezuelans, and if she still flies the stars and stripes it is merely a matter of strategy."

With this understanding, then, firmly fixed in his mind, Captain Schunk spread no superfluous civility over his demand for the surrender of Mrs. Codrington, when for the second time he came within touch of the *Blanco*; and in his turn Commander McTurk rasped back a refusal which made the gun captains' hands on the *Fürst Eitel* hover over their firing keys.

"I give you fair warning," said the German, "that if the lady is not surrendered within the next ten minutes I shall fire into you."

"I am not an inquiry agency," retorted Commander McTurk. "You are a seaman, I suppose, and should be able to read the chap's colours as well as I can—no better, no worse."

Schunk snapped an order, and the telegraph on his bridge jangled viciously. The cruiser's propellers flapped into instant life, and she circled and gathered way. The periscope followed slowly after her, and her gun-muzzles glared blackly at the iron mast and its green escort of bubbles.

The slowness of the periscope's movements perhaps tempted her; for once, when she had drawn away to a mile distant, the cruiser slowed down. But thereupon the periscope disappeared, and the hint was sufficient. Captain Schunk knew too much to risk his ship against the torpedoes of a submarine that he could not see. So he rang once more for full steam, and moved at the top of his speed away from so risky a neighbourhood.

* * * * *

On the *Blanco* a delighted crew welcomed on board their chief engineer, as he came in over the side after an excursion along the sea floor in the destroyer's one and only diving-suit; and they unrove his air-tube from the port on the landward side, through which it had been passed.

"I spoiled Lootenant Stubbs's shaving-mirror to make the heid o' yon periscope," said Mr. McTodd, when his helmet had been taken off; "but it's sairrved its purpose, and you may chuck the bits back into the ditch. But I'll ask ye to pull these boiler tubes on board and uncouple

them with care. The Jew firm that built this packet sent her to sea unco' short of boiler tubes and most other spares. Hech! and here's Mrs. Codrington coming to photograph me and these gadgets as the latest thing in optical delusions. Weel, M'em, I take it ye'll no' sell the pictures at a profit to the German papers. Ye'll find a far more lively market for them in London."

"Not to mention Paris and New York," laughed Commander McTurk. He rubbed his hands. "They've refitted that cylinder-head, Mr. McTodd, whilst you've been out for your walk, and when you have passed it we'll get under way, and try again to get the Venezuelan Government to settle our little bill. I don't think they'll try to pinch the boat without payment a second time."

The men around him grinned, and Stubbs voiced the general sentiment by saying he hoped the Venezuelans would not disappoint them by turning honest. "Funny thing is," said Stubbs, "that the crowd of us here signed on for what we thought would be as dull a trip as could be thought of; and, thanks to you and Mrs. Codrington, it's been turned into the very fanciest kind of picnic."

By previous arrangement the destroyer avoided La Guayra this time, and brought up in the Santa Barbara roadstead. Her arrival was evidently anticipated and prepared for, for, almost before she had shackled her cable end to somebody else's mooring-buoy, a strongly manned rowboat put off from the beach carrying an official who was openly anxious to smooth

matters over. His card stated that he was Don Jaime Serro.

"I think," he said, "that these will prove my strongest credentials, Capitan McTurk," and he pulled out a thick sheaf of United States thousand-dollar bills. "For the rest, these papers will show you that I act for my Government."

"Then probably you want to apologise," said McTurk stiffly, "for the piratical attempt your Government made on this vessel in La Guayra Roads a week ago."

Don Jaime shrugged. "If you wish it, of course, Capitan. But it hardly comes within my province. My Government only came into being yesterday. It is to the late Government you should apply for your apology, and I am afraid you will find them hard to get hold of."

"Been having your usual weekly revolution since I have been away?"

"My country has been undergoing a revolution," said Don Jaime coldly, "but is now, I trust, at rest for evermore."

Commander McTurk took up the sheaf of bills, and wetted his finger, and counted them. The thousand tiny wrinkles in his red face deepened with perplexity. "The sum's all right," he said, "but the question is, am I to take it?"

"I do not see that as a commercial man you can have any hesitation."

"You can take it from me," rasped Commander McTurk, "that I am not a commercial man. I intend to do what's right, and I don't care two straws about the feelings of Venezuela or even

the McMechie Shipbuilding Company on the matter. This vessel was built to the order of a Government which, by your own showing, did not recognise Señor Don Jaime Serro. So I'm going to satisfy myself that Señor Serro's is the legitimate successor to that other Government, before I hand the *Blanco* over."

Don Jaime shrugged and pointed to the sheaf of money. "I should have thought, Capitan, that those would have proved my *bona fides.* But I believe I can still convince you." He fumbled in his pocket and brought out $15,000 more, and offered them with a bow. "I think, Capitan, that this argument will sweep away the rest of your objections."

"If you don't take yourself and your bribe over the side," McTurk snapped, "I'll throw you and it into the water. Quick! don't answer me. Go, you dago scum!"

The man would have hesitated, but McTurk with a furious gesture drove him out on deck, and had a foot ready to lift him over to his boat. Don Jaime avoided this, leaped, skidded on a thwart, sprawled amongst his oarsmen, and picked himself up looking a million maledictions. But even then his diplomacy did not desert him.

"As you wish for further conviction in the matter of my Government's *bona fides*, may I ask you to visit the General commanding ashore?"

"He may call on me here."

"Oh, of course if you are afraid of any little disturbance which may occur——"

"I am the least nervous of men, Señor Serro.

Show me a reason why your General cannot come out here, and I'll call on him."

Serro's shoulders shrugged. "The thing is simple. War may break out between Venezuela and Germany any moment—has broken out already, for anything I can say—and with the *Fürst Eitel* prowling about our coasts, naturally all our military men are hard at work putting the finishing touches to our defences. That also is the reason for our wish to take over the *Blanco* so quickly, and that is why I offered the small additional inducement, in the hope that it might expedite matters. You take me?"

Commander McTurk scratched his long nose with a doubtful forefinger. "I don't know that I do. But I'll come ashore." And he turned to Lieutenant Stubbs, and asked him to call away a boat.

Night fell with tropical suddenness as they gained the beach, but raw arc lamps promptly sizzled out by the side of the streets, and lit the place like day. It is not healthy in a Venezuelan city to leave any dark corners when revolution is in the air. In the far distance there hung a mutter of sound that might have been thunder and might have been firing. But Commander McTurk troubled his head little about that, and set off at a brisk walk for the Municipal Building.

There was a buzz about the city which told that the population was awake, but few people met the eye. Here and there he came across a squad of men in ragged uniform, with rifles at the ready, patrolling the streets; and now and then

civilians passed him, for the most part at the run, and clutching weapons beneath their cloaks. It was one of these wayfarers who saw an acquaintance at a window, bawled forth a remark to him, and whipped out a revolver. The acquaintance did the same, and they fired six shots apiece, and scored twelve misses. After which they bowed ceremoniously, and the wayfarer continued his journey, reloading his revolver as he ran.

"By Glory!" chuckled Commander McTurk, "I used to think I was about the worst pistol-shot on earth, but there are sportsmen down here in South America who can run me close. Yes, Señor Serro?"

Serro came running back to him from a cross-road, blue-faced and frightened.

"There is some slight disturbance—down there, Capitan—and it might be advisable—to go round some other way. They have stationed a machine gun——"

"*Pr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-ump!*" said a Maxim, and a gust of bullets sang down the cross street, and broke glass that tinkled somewhere in the distance.

"If you will come with me, Capitan, I—will lead you to the General another way. We need —not run."

"I was not going to suggest running," said McTurk placidly. "I thought you said your revolution was a thing accomplished? You don't seem to have got all the votes in yet."

"It is nearly over. We are quietening them down."

"With Maxim's soothing-syrup.—Well, Don

Jaime, who is it you want to introduce me to?"

"The General commanding. We shall name him President of Venezuela to-morrow."

"Won't do," said Commander McTurk. "I guess it's your yesterday's president I'm consigned to. Where's he?"

Don Jaime grinned spitefully. "I'm afraid, Capitan, your walk is wasted if that's the man you want. He is on his way to Paris; and though he has taken with him all the contents of our treasury he could lay hands upon, I do not think that, if you did come across him in France, he would still be a buyer of torpedo-boat destroyers. Much better take the offer I have made."

"I am going to convince myself that you are the legitimate successors of my consignees before I part, Señor Serro, so take me the nearest way to your General's house."

"*Pr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-ump!*" snapped the Maxim at their elbows as they turned off down the side street.

The present writer forgets the name of the General commanding at Santa Barbara, whom Señor Serro named as president designate of Venezuela; but it does not especially concern this tale, as Commander J. K. McTurk never met him. When he arrived at the house, the General, it was announced, was "out pacifying the town," and McTurk wondered whether he was in any way concerned with that garrulous Maxim, and, if so, whether he was stationed at the breech or the muzzle end.

But there was little leisure just then for mere academic speculation. He was shown into a room, a council-room by appearance, in which some score of patriots were all talking together with enthusiastic noise and excitement. Their tongue was the local Spanish patois, and Commander McTurk had little enough of it. By way of keeping their concerns private from the outside world the windows of the room were most closely shuttered, but the place was lit with raw unshaded electrics which showed up every man's face with unkind clearness.

For ten minutes or so the din was overpowering, but then came a lull, and Serro took advantage of it to introduce the visitor and state his business. But thereupon the uproar again broke out with renewed vigour. It appeared there were two parties in the room. Commander McTurk did not know who they might be, or what were their political opinions; he was quite in a mist as to whether either of them represented the current Government or the Government of yesterday; but he understood very clearly that both sides wanted the *Blanco*, and that both sides with equal vehemence claimed her as theirs by right.

At last one patriot smote another with finger-tips across his passionate face, and two revolvers were plucked out and fired. Neither of the shooters was touched, but a man by the door coughed queerly, and collapsed as though the body had suddenly been extracted from his clothes. On the instant it appeared that every person in the place had a weapon in his hand

and was preparing to use it, but at that point some one got hold of the master-switch, and out went all the lights.

After the fierce electric glare, the black velvety darkness in that room seemed almost palpable. There was an instantaneous rustle of movement: every man instinctively moved till his back was up against a wall: and then there was a frozen silence, whilst each listened for his neighbour's breath so as to get an idea where he was.

Commander J. K. McTurk was one of the bravest men I ever met, but he owned to me freely that when those lights went out he was for the moment desperately scared. He held the warship which both parties of them wanted; he was in the position of the grain of corn between the upper and nether millstone; and every second he expected to feel the scald of cold steel scouring between his ribs, or to cringe before the sear of a bullet.

But in spite of what he says, I gather that he was too old a hand to be upset for long. He stretched out a long cautious hand on either side of him, to (as he said) take soundings. On one flank he touched the plush of a turned-back Spanish cloak: on the other he fumbled against a hand and the haft of a knife. By the movement of the air—or by instinct more likely—he felt that hand uplifted to strike. He gripped it in mid-air. With his other hand he gripped the body to which it was attached, and then, using all of his enormous strength, he lifted up the man and hurled him through the darkness to the op-

posite side of the room. And at that point some one's nerves gave way, and in came the lights again.

A dozen threatening faces were turned towards the American. "You have killed Señor Serro," one of them cried at him.

"Serro, was it?" said McTurk coolly. "I couldn't tell by the smell of him in the dark. Some one tried to stick cutlery into me, and I manhandled him. Natural, I guess. And anyway he's not dead. I'll do as much for any of you other gentlemen, if you'll kindly come round here and interfere with me. But whilst we are on the subject of Serro, I want to know if he's to have my ship? He came to me with a yarn about representing your Government, and I must say he had got enough dollars to make some sort of a backing to his tale. But I deliver the *Blanco* only to the parties who contracted for her, or their legitimate successors."

An old white-headed man stood forward, and waved his compatriots into silence. "Señor Capitan McTurk," he said, "if you are not too nervous to dine here and sleep——"

"Oh, there's no nervousness about me, thanks."

"Good. Then I shall myself have the honour to wake you early to-morrow morning, and you shall see the remaining members of the late Government finally abdicate. Then, as our party will be in power without opposition, I suppose it will satisfy you that we are the Government."

"That will do for me."

"And you will hand over the *Blanco* without further discussion?"

"Glad to be quit of her, señor."

"Señor Capitan, I honour you as showing the sound practical sense of your nation." . . . He looked at his watch. . . . "Dinner has been spoiling for three-quarters of an hour. If it please you, we will now go and sit down, before it gets further over-cooked."

Commander McTurk slept that night as a sailor sleeps. He got the maximum of rest out of each minute, but he was ready on the instant to spring into complete wakefulness if any alarm was given. However, the city seemed to slumber —perhaps the Maxims had lulled its turbulent politicians to rest—and the most of the night passed without disturbance. Still day had not yet dawned when the white-haired old man came to wake him.

"I'll be with you in ten minutes," said McTurk.

"Pardon, but it is a moment for hurry, señor."

"Can't help it," said McTurk; "I don't turn out unwashed and ungroomed for anybody in South America. . . . By the way," he added, when presently they met, "I never caught your name last night."

"José Serro."

"By Glory! Any relation?"

"It was my son you threw across the room."

"Of course you know he—well, we disagreed?"

"I know exactly what happened, and what

you did was the natural thing, and for it I do not blame you. My son was in the wrong: he put his personal feelings before his public duty. Now, with me personal feelings come second."

"I see. Then——"

"The Señor Capitan is of use to my country. He holds a warship that we want. Therefore"—the old gentleman bowed his white head courteously—"it is the duty of every patriot to hold el Capitan McTurk unhurt in spite of any provocation he may offer."

"But once you get the *Blanco*," Commander McTurk reminded himself privately, "you'd cut my throat, you old duck, with all the pleasure in a Christmas tea-party. Well, it's a queer climate down here."

They went out through many sounding white-washed corridors, and at last came to a great square courtyard at the back of the house. Dawn was just about to break, and the air was full of chill. There were soldiers in the courtyard, rifle-armed, and drawn up in line, and in a second or so, when Commander McTurk's eyes were attuned to the gloom, he saw that against the farther wall was another row of men, two of them drooping on chairs, the rest standing. But one and all were bound.—It flashed upon him that he had been brought out to witness an execution of all members of the late Government who had fallen into the hands of those who had now seized the power.

He put a word to Señor Serro, and found that this was so. "By Glory!" said McTurk to the old man, "you've got a queer notion

of humour, turning me out first thing in the morning to see this sort of entertainment."

Don José shrugged. It was plain which side of the house Don Jaime had inherited his shrug from. "The Señor Capitan must thank himself. My son offered the only settlement that we thought an American would care about, some hours ago now."

"Then you judged Yankee tastes wrong," Commander McTurk rasped out. "Here's the dawn beginning to light up, and one can see things a bit. D'ye mind my saying a word to that end man but one on the right-hand side?"

"Most certainly not. We wish, Señor Capitan, to offer you every possible courtesy."

McTurk stalked across with long rapid stride. "Ah! I thought so. You seem to have got yourself into an ugly place, von Ralle. How did you get here?"

"Hullo! that you, McTurk? So you've managed to chip in with the winning side, have you?"

"It looks like it. But I hate to see you up against this wall."

"I don't fancy the berth myself."

"Well," said McTurk thoughtfully, "I don't quite know how much power I've got at court just now, but I'm open to straining it a trifle—er—for the sake of a fee."

Von Ralle stared. "You're not after money: I know you well enough for that. But you'd better tell me. I'm too dished-up to guess riddles just now."

"I'm buying Santa Barbara Waterworks stock. Presuming you have still got your holding of a month ago——?"

"I have. Well?"

"If I get you clear of this, will you sign me a transfer for 10 per cent. of your holding?"

The man against the wall gave a cackle of laughter. "And so you're still fool enough to dangle after Mrs. Lucy Codrington, are you? Well, McTurk, if that's your idea of bliss, you can have the stock, though I warn you I'm buying my life for what's no better than waste-paper. My God, but there's the sun. I didn't think I should ever see it again."

* * * *

It was a very pleased Mrs. Codrington that Commander McTurk dined with for the last time on the destroyer that night, and so frequent was their laughter that Mr. Neil Angus McTodd (who still regarded himself in the light of a chaperon) felt more than once obliged to lift a skylight, and cough down a warning for more seemly behaviour.

"And you think," said the lady, "that this Serro creature will actually play honest? My dear J. K., you're more than a genius if you can make him do that. You'd better pay up that two and a half dollars you betted me I shouldn't win."

"Well," said McTurk complacently, "I've got a very nice little hold on him, as I've explained to you. Here's your money. I never enjoyed losing a bet more."

"I don't wonder that Herr von Ralle gave up his controlling shares so easily."

"I guess von Ralle finds the climate of Venezuela doesn't agree with him one little bit. He came ashore to argue, and they stuck him up against that wall before he'd said ten words. Well, Lucy, you own more than half of the Santa Barbara Waterworks stock now, and you've got a guarantee that they'll pay their rates; and I think that's all you asked for in return for——"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Codrington coyly. "There's Mr. McTodd coughing again."

"He's coughing whiskey, I noticed, the old soaker. Confound McTodd! Here, Lucy, you've just got to marry me, and that's the end of it."

She turned to him and put her hand in his. "I will, J. K., on one condition. Stay here with me in Santa Barbara, and help me run these waterworks."

Commander McTurk's big hand trembled. Commander McTurk's face paled as much as as nature would allow. "But Lucy," he pleaded, "my profession? You know how desperately anxious I am to get back on the active list of the Navy, and if I put in time down here, the chance might slip away. You know what the Navy is to me."

"And you know what these waterworks are to me, J. K. I am a woman, and this is my first big financial win. You can't ask me to desert it."

Commander McTurk looked at the hand that lay in his, and felt that the wrench of his two desires was almost more great than he could bear. From above the chief engineer regarded him with a bibulous eye.

Then the skylight opened, and a waft of whiskey came down, and discipline had to be asserted. Commander McTurk jumped to his feet. "You dissolute mechanic," he shouted, "I'll teach you to misbehave yourself on this ship!" and with that he rushed out on deck.

Lucy Codrington dropped her face into her hands. "Oh," she moaned, "if I don't take great care, I shall lose him yet. Oh, J. K., you darling, come back!"

Chapter IX

MANOA

It would have been very hard for any one to have recognised Commander McTurk in the fight which raged around the mine.

To almost all his acquaintances he was a man habitually spruce, and smart, and almost dandified; his hair was a wig, it is true, but it was always dressed to a nicety; his linen was immaculate; his hands suggested the attentions of the manicurist.

But this great tattered savage, who stormed through the fight with a shot gun, seemed quite divorced from the man who had once been the best-dressed officer in the United States Navy. His feet were bare, his trousers were fringed from the knee, and his shirt lacked a sleeve. Blood oozed from a cut on his high bald head, and blinded him till he wiped his eyes clear with the back of a grimy hand.

International law makes a shot gun an illegal weapon, but in frontier fighting at the back of Venezuela men pick the tool that best fits their hand. Moggridge the orchid-hunter, who was too short-sighted to see without his spectacles, except at the closest of close quarters, used an axe, and used it too with a murderous effectiveness

that a Crusader might have envied. Commander McTurk went into action with a double-barrelled No. 12 hammerless ejector. He got in eight shots with this as they ran up into range, two more fired pistol fashion before he closed, and then, shifting ends, sailed in with the butt.

Now, novelists notwithstanding, the butt of a shot gun is only a flimsy weapon for a strong man. At the first smite the stock parts with a short fracture just behind the trigger guard, and one has to finish the battle with the locks and breechpiece. For nicely judged blows this abbreviated weapon can do heavy execution. But once hit—say—an opposing head with the middle of the barrel, and the thing bends just as a man can bend a poker round his own forearm.

The peons who followed them were but poor fighting men. Three went down badly hurt in the first charge, two dropped deliberately and risked the trampling, and one fled, letting out screams of terror high-pitched as a woman's. So McTurk and Moggridge had all the work on their own shoulders, but they went grimly on with it, without an idea of flinching.

But two men, however madly and tremendously they may fight, cannot stand up against twenty—and there were at least twenty of the so-called miners still remaining unhurt. Moreover, the two were losing strength. The orchid-hunter had been badly stabbed in the thigh; Commander McTurk had again been cut on the head, and the blinding blood trickled more swiftly into his eyes. It seemed to Moggridge that they were within an ace of extinction.

The tall American, however, possessed one of those brains which work most clearly and most inventively in moments of the hardest stress. He shouted to Moggridge to run for the old mine tunnel; and though to the collector's mind the move was as good as suicide, he gave way to the stronger man's advice, and limped to the adit as fast as his wounded leg would let him. Commander J. K. McTurk fought a rearguard action of unexampled ferocity, and followed him at an equal pace.

The entrance was partly closed by stones and soil which had trickled down from the steep hill-face above, and it was fringed with those delicate ferns and pendent creepers which grow so luxuriantly in that moist warm Venezuelan climate. There was only just room for a man to pass between this débris and the crown of the arch, but the sturdy Moggridge crawled in legs first, leaving a trail of blood behind him, and the lengthy McTurk followed with the bent barrels of the shot gun still clutched in an aching hand.

For an instant they looked out upon blue sky and tree-tops, and then their view was sliced across by a fringe of maddened faces.

"Come in, you curs!" McTurk invited.

But the miners' courage had its limits, and their numbers had been so thinned in the fight that they had no further appetite for handgrips. They yapped and they howled and they cursed outside in the open, but no one of them made any attempt to pass under the ferns of the archway.

"Looks like a good opportunity to fix up this hole in my leg," said Moggridge. "I say, J. K., could you tie this string whilst I jam the pad against the cut?—Hell! but that hurts. Thanky, man. It's time that leak was caulked. I've lost a deuce of a lot of blood. How about those chips on your sconce?"

"Oh, they'll cake over. It's stopped dripping into my eye already. I wonder when those hounds will remember they've got dynamite stowed away in one of their mine sheds?"

"To blow down the hill on top of us? You did foresee that, then? I thought of it the instant you said run for the adit here. Personally I'd rather have seen it through in the open than be buried alive under this blessed muck-heap. But it was a gorgeous fight, J. K.!"

"I didn't come in here to invite a funeral."

"Got a scheme, then?"

"I don't say we're out of the wood by any means, but I do think we've got a good cat's chance. This hill has been mined from the days of the Incas onwards, and it's just honeycombed with holes. Lots have tumbled in, of course, and many are blind alleys with the one opening; but it's on the cards we're in one that links up to daylight again somewhere else."

"Where those mongrels will be duly waiting for us."

"Not necessarily. The neighbourhood is practically unexplored, and I don't suppose they know much more about it than we do. You see, the mines were dropped when Spain was kicked out in the Liberator days; and, in a country like

this, secondary forest will blot out a road in a year's time, and hermetically seal any district in ten."

"So when Mrs. Codrington's crowd came along here with their machetes and picks, they were practically opening up new ground? I didn't know."

"That's so."—Poor McTurk sighed heavily. "I wonder where they've got her now. Fat lot of use we've been in trying to get her out of the mess!"

"Well, she'll have to be content with the knowledge—if it ever reaches her—that we've done our best."

"No, my lad, be hanged to that tale!" rasped Commander McTurk. "I said I was going to get her out of these scoundrels' hands, and, by Glory! I'll do it yet. Here, lift a foot. We must get out of this."

A small, brown cylinder, with a tail that spluttered and smoked, was thrown from without into the mouth of the tunnel, and lay there smelling quietly. The yells and revilings of the miners had toned down into silence, and once more the patch of blue sky and the fringe of trees hung before them, unsullied by the row of savage faces. And then another cartridge, also with its fuse cheerily burning, leaped up into sight, and dropped beside the first.

The sturdy Moggridge led the way back into the darkness, limping and stumbling over the débris dropped from the roof, slithering over the greasy mud of the floor, cannoning with his elbows against the rocky walls. Commander

McTurk followed intimately upon his heels. It was borne in upon both of their minds that if they did not get beyond reach of its blast, the dynamite, when it exploded, would shoot them into the depths of the mountain like missiles from a gun.

But as it happened, though the fuses were of no liberal length, they had got an early start, and when the explosion did come, it merely threw them to the muddy floor. The whole mountain cringed to the shock; there was a roar of cascading rock; and the blue patch of daylight behind them was eternally eclipsed. "And so begins," said Commander McTurk, "a fresh chapter. Come on at once. We may want every second between us and starvation for finding the way out."

* * * * *

It was not absolutely dark in those old mine workings. In places the men of bygone days had pinned the roof and the rocky sides with wooden props, and though most of these in the hot moist atmosphere of the mine had gone to punk and disappeared, some still remained, spongy, slimy, and luminous. It must not be understood that these weird ghostly lights in any manner displayed the way. They merely, as it were, softened the darkness and made it less palpable.

The pair soon began to come upon side galleries branching off the main road, and explored these with set design. They bore always to the left so as to leave no route untried, but kept always in touch with their original point of departure.

Commander McTurk was a sailor, and the labour of doing this small task of navigation came easy to him.

McTurk led, with his long body bent double, and the sturdy Moggridge hobbled gamely on behind. Sometimes they trod in water, sometimes on greasy mud. Now they had to squirm over a roof-fall, and squeeze themselves desperately between tottering rocks. Now they had to squirm like worms under the downward V's of rotting broken props. And once McTurk walked over the brink of an unseen shaft, and fell horribly into unknown depths. But, as it happened, the shaft was short, and water broke his fall, and he scrambled out, shaken it is true, but with his high courage still untapped. There was only one thing in that mine that really frayed J. K. McTurk's nerves. Great colonies of toads, for some reason best known to themselves, inhabited some of the alleys, and when in the velvety darkness his bare foot came in contact with one of these obscene creatures, he was filled with a shudder of horror that made him long to shout aloud at each repulsive contact. Now, Moggridge damned the toads loudly and openly, but really did not mind them one bit. So differently are men made.

As their eyes grew larger with the darkness, the luminous patches lured them here and there into useless explorations; but indeed it was this glow from decaying wood that at last put them on the way of escape, and but for it they must have perished miserably in the mine. They had gone the whole way round, explored every

gallery, sounded every downward shaft, and had come back to their starting-point, where the dynamite had sealed the cave mouth with the landslide.

"And I guess," said Moggridge, "that this is the finish. I wish I'd a gun to stand myself just one comfortable shot through the head. It will be the very devil starving here by inches."

"I'm not going to starve," said McTurk doggedly. "I'm going to get out."

"I don't want to rub it in, old man, but I've heard you say that before."

"Well, you can hear me say it again. I've betted you two dollars and a half we'd get Lucy Codrington out of those brigands' hands, and by Glory! I'm going to lift the money. Lick your finger, and hold it up."

"Hullo!" said Moggridge, in genuine astonishment, "there's a draught. I can feel it distinctly."

"Of course there is. There have been draughts here and there all over the mine, but you've been too thick-skinned to notice them."

"Too blown and too hot."

"Well, have it how you like. But there have been draughts. And that means that these holes couple up with the outside air somewhere, and by Glory! I'm the man that's going to find the place. Come along."

"My leg's pretty bad. I can't get much farther."

"Hobble as far as you can, and when it gives way altogether I'll carry you. Come on."

As fate would have it, they hit upon the path of exit within the next twenty yards. Commander

McTurk's head for the seven hundredth time grazed the roof, and involuntarily his eyes were deflected upwards. He saw the phosphorescence of decaying wood above him. He peered and peered with the desperate intensity of a man whose life hangs on his wits, and saw more phosphorescence above—a column of it, as it were, stretching far up into the awful blackness. He wetted a finger and held it above his head. The upper side distinctly chilled first. There was a vertical shaft above them, and somehow or other it connected with the open air.

Commander McTurk got on to Moggridge's shoulders and fumbled for the opening. It was timbered with rotting wood, which gave way to his touch; but the shaft was narrow, and those forgotten miners who had sunk it from the drift above had cut footholes in the sides for the convenience of their own ascents. Even the lame orchid-hunter could climb the shaft easily, once he had been lifted on to its bottom lip.

The rest of their escape to the outer air was comfortably easy. They came upon another series of tunnels, or perhaps one might say another mine, well-ventilated, with an air blowing steadily through it. They walked and stumbled on with accurate care, always upwind, and then of a sudden McTurk stopped and gave a little cackle of laughter. "Look up," he said.

"Why, they're stars!" said Moggridge, peering up with short-sighted eyes. "By Crumbs!" J. K., we've walked out into the world again, and I'm not a dead man yet. Well, I've to thank you,

and the fact that I hadn't a gun, for the escape. Lord, but I am fagged."

"Looks like a hut across there."

"Benab, they call it in this country. We'll probably get fever from sleeping on the ground. Come along. Let me lead the way for once."

"Hullo!—hammocks," said McTurk, peering in under the trooly-palm roof. But Moggridge was snoring in one of the hammocks already, and the tall sailor turned in to the other. "I suppose I ought to stand a watch," he yawned, but his reflections got no further.

* * * * *

When Commander McTurk next opened his eyes, equatorial day burned high in the heavens, and the air was noisy with insect life and garrulous with the chatter of frogs. In the other hammock he could see Moggridge's face, red, drawn, and feverish; but he was conscious of being inspected from a different quarter, and turned his eye to look. Yes, sure enough there was a young Indian girl, bareheaded under the scathing sunshine, and dressed simply in a beaded queyo.

"Hullo!" said the sailor, and threw his legs over the side of the hammock and sat up. "Good morning."

The girl made no reply in words, but she dropped on her knees and knocked her forehead three times on the ground.

Now, she was a very comely young person, and Commander McTurk told himself that at a moment like this he was no stickler for ceremony. So he dropped down on to his feet and picked

her up. "Sorry I don't speak Arawack, or Carib, or whatever language is fashionable about here, and you appear to have no good United States. We dropped in without invitation last night, and I apologise for the filthy state in which you see me. Do you keep a wash-tub hereabouts, or a river without too many alligators where one might get a bathe?"

But at this point Moggridge woke up, and rapidly took in the situation. "For the Lord's sake, J. K., hold up, and mind what you're doing. Don't you try your flirting ways round here." He put a word in the native to the girl, and after puzzling over it a moment she rather shyly answered him. "Yes, just what I guessed. We're out of the frying-pan, maybe, but we're uncommon near the fire."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Torture—no less. If accounts are true, and this young lady's male relations catch us, they'll lop off our hands and feet, and gouge out our eyes, and turn us adrift as a gentle hint to the rest of the world that they don't want callers. I saw a poor buck I once employed in Cayenne treated that way. I was trying to get a skull of these people for an ethnographical museum at that time, but I turned up the contract when I saw that buck. Look at the turn of her jaw. She's an Akatee Indian right enough."

"She seemed quite civil. In fact, she was doing some sort of an obeisance when I stopped her."

"Oh, that's all right. She's never seen a white man before, and took you and your affable ways

for one of the gods that inhabit the old mine yonder. But I guess the bucks of her tribe won't be so religious-minded, and they're sure to be close at hand somewhere." He got stiffly down and peered into the edges of the forest. "Yes, there are three more benabs over past that bourgainvillea. And there are at least two buckeens and a litter of chiidren working in that cassava ground. I thought I could smell the smoke of the cooking fires. You can lay to it the men aren't far away. I say, J. K., I advise you to clear out. I shall manage all right. Crumbs! but my leg is hot and stiff this morning."

Of the suggestion that he should desert his wounded companion Commander McTurk took no notice whatever. "Look here," he said: "you speak the language. So just ask Miss What's-her-name which is the nearest way to the bathroom. I don't mind being killed if it can't be helped, but I'll not stay filthy for another hour at any price. You'd better come too; you're mud-caked from head to foot; and when you're clean, I'll dress that cut in your thigh for you. The bother of it is I don't see how I am to mend up these disgusting rags. I wonder if it would be possible to scare up a suit of clothes anyhow."

The orchid-hunter laughed. "An Akatee buck's lap is about the same size and cut as the queyo that Nora there is wearing. There's not the least chance of your getting anything else. But by all means fig yourself out in a lap if you're that way inclined. I'm sure you'd look most classical in it.—I say, J. K., old man, don't jump

or anything. The girl's watching, so get a good hold on your nerves. Just look on that crooked rafter above your head, and up against the trooly thatch. What do you see there?"

"Do you mean the yellow bowl?"

"Yes: what's it made of?"

"Calabash, I suppose. No, it isn't, though—it's metal. Softish, too, at that. By Glory! Moggridge, you don't mean to tell me that's gold?"

"It ought to be. It all fits into the tale. That poor buck of mine from Cayenne told me that these Akatee Indians had gold piwarrie bowls, and gold cassava squeezers, and gold this, that, and t'other. Gold is about the same value with the Akatees as putty is with us. Now, there's no big city here, with stone palaces, and a king, and a religion, and processions of priests and all the rest of it. There are only a few benabs stuck down in forest clearings, and a few naked Indians to own them. But I want you to realise, J. K., that you're in the golden city of Manoa, or as near to it as anybody outside a storybook ever got, and that I personally would give four eye-teeth and five toe-nails to be out of it. Now let loose your imagination on that."

"I am realising," said Commander McTurk steadily, "that I detailed myself off to help Mrs. Codrington out of the hands of those mining scoundrels who kidnapped her, and that is an object I don't intend to let anything else except personal cleanliness get in the way of. I say, would you mind keeping Nora here and amusing her whilst I find that creek?"

He went out then into the scalding sunshine, and walked across the savannah that lay before them towards a point where water winked amongst the greenery. The Indian girl wished to go with him, but McTurk bowed her politely back to the hut. The orchid-hunter laughed in spite of his scare. "You do have a way with you, J. K.," he called out. "You do touch their little hearts right on the spot."

But Commander McTurk walked on with his head up in the air, and pretended not to hear.

At the water he washed enjoyably, and with a wisp of palmetto dusted from his clothes all the clay and mud that was removable. His head was still bare and smooth, and he would have made a big sacrifice for a decent wig. But it was out of the question to hope for such a luxury down there at the back of Venezuela, or British Guiana, or wherever exactly this unsurveyed Akatee valley was. So he compromised on a broad-brimmed hat, plaiting strips of aloe in eight-ply with a sailor's deftness, and sewing these into shape with fibre.

It was at this point that a party of bucks came upon him, and promptly held an inquest over his disposal. They were just returned from hunting, and their backs were bloodied with game which hung from their forehead straps. They carried machetes, and wooden spears with fire-hardened heads, and looked fully disposed to use them.

Commander McTurk had left the wreck of his gun in the mine, and had just two hard and capable fists with which to defend himself.

Moreover, there was exactly one of him, and there were fourteen Indians. So he decided it was a case for diplomacy, and wished them a pleasant good morning, and went on with his plaiting.

They chatted amongst themselves, and two of the older bucks swung back their machetes viciously.

Commander McTurk went on with his plaiting and his explanation: "I may tell you we've arrived here by the most unlikely of accidents. A friend of ours, a Mrs. Codrington, was up in this neighbourhood on some mining proposition that I warned her was dangerous, but I must give her the credit to say that she pulled off the deal all right. However, the blackguards she was bidding against were not the crowd to stick at trifles, and so they kidnapped her, and they've got her gaoled somewhere in this country, snug and tight. Well, she got word sent down that she'd like a bit of my help. She'd refused it before, I'd have you understand, gentlemen, and so I just packed up the painting tackle I was employing myself with, and came off right then.—I hope all this yarn is interesting you?"

Now the Indians, as Commander McTurk guessed very easily, had no English, but his placid easy speech had the effect he hoped for. It caused them to cease from chattering amongst themselves, and listen in some amazement to what he was saying. The two machete-men lowered their weapons. One gory hunter even went so far as to unhitch the sooriana strap from his forehead and sit down amongst the ferns, so

that he might hear and observe more at his ease.

"You'll meet presently my friend Mr. Moggridge, who's in a hammock, with a hole in his leg, in that benab there down by the crotons. He was up this blessed country orchid-hunting, and incidentally doing a bit of skull-collecting, and we met one day, the first time for five years, when my woodskin had upset in a rapid. He came along with me and brought his peons; he said very kindly that there would be orchids he wanted where I was going; and when we came up to the mine that's been the cause of all Mrs. Codrington's trouble, he fought with the toughs we met there in a way that made me wish he'd been born a United States citizen, instead of a poor devil of a down-trodden Britisher.—There, I can see that all this nice quiet talk has cooled down your martial ardour, and I think now we might venture to join forces with my friend."

Commander McTurk finished sewing the last plait on to his hat, put it on his head, surveyed the effect in the mirror of the stream, and rose slowly to his feet. "I guess," he said, with a courteous bow, "that we'll now go across and pay a call on Mr. Moggridge, and I'm sure it should tickle you to see how interested he'll be in the contour of your heads."

But this pleasing suggestion was very promptly opposed. One of the bucks rapped out an order, and the others, with the quickness of a pantomine trick, jumped to their places, and the sailor was ringed in with a threatening bristle of weapons. For an instant he looked at the smooth still water

behind him, and thought of diving in, and taking his chance of the alligators; but that would leave Moggridge behind, and so he put the idea from his mind on the moment of its arrival. The mantle of diplomacy was still the only wear. So he slipped his hands into the remains of his breeches pockets, and shook his head at the spears, and laughed.

"It was theatrical, of course, that move of yours, Colonel, but doesn't it rather jar on your ideas of hospitality?" He addressed his question to the big buck who had given the order, and the man nodded and made some incomprehensible reply. Then he picked up his sooriana, and began fumbling for something inside it.

"If that's your flask you're hunting for," said McTurk, "you've thought of something that will tickle me right down to the heels. I've been wanting a nip of whiskey, after walking on the toads in that beastly mine, more than I tell you."

But the Indian brought out neither food nor drink from his bushrope bag. Instead, he produced a large nugget of water-worn gold, and after saying a word or two to his friends, handed it to Commander McTurk.

The sailor took the present, and the spear points dropped. "Am I to understand that you picked this up during your morning promenade, Colonel?" he asked, and translated his question with easy signs.

The chief nodded.

"Then you may take the tip from me that if you want to keep this sweltering country to your naked selves, you'd better not advertise the fact

that there's an alluvial goldfield somewhere close and handy. If you do, you'll have half the rapscallions in Christendom treading over your pagan country, and you'll be civilised across to the happy hunting-grounds. I'm travelling light just now, and can't carry keepsakes, and if you've got no immediate use for this gold to make tooth-stopping for yourselves, you'd better let me make a hole in the water with it." He signed what he meant. "Come now, colonel, shall I?"

The chief nodded, and Commander McTurk threw the nugget so that it made ducks and drakes across the surface of the water, and framed itself in diamond-drops of spray under the sunshine before it sank.

That ended the strain. The Indians dropped their weapons and strung out across the savannah, and Commander McTurk went with them to where the cooking fires made savoury odours before their benabs.

He was seated presently near Moggridge's hammock, beneath a trooly thatch, eating a bowl of pepper-pot that fairly blazed with heat, and discussing the situation. "I am not a greedy man," he explained, "by any means; but I suppose I like a chunk of gold, for the sake of what it may purchase, just as well as the next fellow. But it was not very hard to see what was in the boss savage's mind. I was to be put to the ordeal. If I showed covetousness, they would make a pincushion of me; if I didn't, they would reserve judgment."

"I guess they are reserving it still," said Moggridge with a shiver. "Whilst you were away

Nora was entertaining me with an account of how they operate, without anæsthetics, on callers they don't take a fancy to."

When the heat of the day had worn itself through, Commander McTurk by the help of many signs explained to the Indian girl, who had come to see them, that although, much to his annoyance, he could not take away any birds' eggs to add to his collection, still he possessed a stub of pencil and the backs of a couple of letters to take notes upon, and any local ornithological hints he could pick up would gratify him exceedingly. He imitated the chime of a bell-bird, and the *who-are-yeou* of the goat-sucker, and Nora grasped what he wanted, and led him off into the forest with adoring looks.

"You do fascinate that young person," Moggridge called after them from his hammock. "I just love to see you straighten your shoulders and cock your hat when she makes eyes at you."

"You shut your silly head," McTurk snapped back at him, "and leave me to get out of this mess without interfering more than you can help."

Now Commander John Kelly McTurk, as has been pointed out before in these memoirs, had a distinct eye for the beautiful in Nature, and he would have been very well pleased to have stayed in the valley for a dozen weeks making attempts to get down some of its beauties upon canvas. But this matter of Mrs. Codrington took up all his thoughts: his honour was pledged to the rescuing of her; and even that chiefest of all

his ambitions, the regaining of a position on the active list of the United States Navy, was for the moment left out of sight in the background.

He tramped over and across the savannah, and walked down winding forest paths, exploring the place day after day, and always with the girl Nora at his heels; but either he came upon unscalable rocky cliffs or walls of impassable bush. The river, too, was hopeless as a way of escape. There were bateaux, it is true, and woodskins on the placid length which ran through the valley; but the lower end of the stream shot over a bellowing fall between upright walls of rock, and the upper sources were guarded much in the same way.

Always one of the Indians accompanied him on these rambles, and others seemed invariably to be hunting or fishing or strolling within call. Sometimes the chief himself, the big buck whom McTurk had first addressed as Colonel, came with him, and the sailor handed out his opinion of the valley and the Akatees from time to time in a vigorous Anglo-Saxon, which gave the savage a fine amusement. But in spite of many attempts Commander McTurk never managed to get the fellow to repeat so much as a sentence of English. He would shake his head and point to his tongue, as though to signify that such barbaric sounds were quite beyond him.

With Nora it was different: Nora soon prattled a pretty broken English of her own; but then Nora openly adored him. Commander J. K. McTurk had an unconscious knack of fascination with women.

One spot only in the whole of the valley was the sailor not allowed to explore, and that was a spinney of tall trees in the middle of one of the larger savannahs. They were passing it one day, he and the limping short-sighted Moggridge, when a goat-sucker called *Who-are-yeou* from out of the branches of a great silk cotton-wood.

"I bet two dollars and a half that bird's nesting," said McTurk. "Come on."

"Let it nest," said Moggridge. "You've inspected forty goat-suckers' eggs in this infernal valley, to my certain knowledge."

"I don't know yet what a full clutch is. I've only seen twos and threes in the nests, and they've all been fresh laid, and I'm pretty nearly certain they must produce more for the average brood. Besides, the markings vary so much, that new eggs are always interesting. Come on, man, and I'll find a new orchid for you."

"I've got a benab full of tip-top orchids, and not a cat's chance of getting them away. They'd be worth six or eight thousand pounds if I could get them to a shipping port, and I'd take just that other two dollars and fifty cents that you owe me, and I can't see the colour of, for the lot of them.—I say, J. K., just go slow. There are some bucks in that little wood, and if they are out hunting and we disturb the game they may cut up awkward."

"Rot!" said Commander McTurk: "they're tame enough," and presently was held up by three spears pointed at his chest and two at each groin.

"Quite like your happy home," he said coolly

over his shoulder to Moggridge. "'Trespassers will be prosecuted: man-traps and spring-guns set here.'—Don't trouble to kill me, gentlemen. I'm not keen enough on a goat-sucker's nest to try and pass your weapons, you wall-eyed, flat-footed, indecent sons of Belial."

But with the exception of this one place they were allowed to roam the valley as they pleased, to watch the buckeens working their cassava gardens, to see the bucks catch labbas and monkeys for the family pepper-pot, to gather what they pleased in the way of eggs and botanical specimens, and if it had not been for the incessant thoughts for Mrs. Codrington, they might have lived there pleasantly enough. There were heavy tropical rain-storms to be avoided or endured, it is true, and at times the insect pests were so bad that they had to fill the benab with a smudge of smoke before they could sleep. But they both kept free from fever, and their hurts mended healthily, and, indeed, except for a certain loose captivity, they had little enough to grumble about in the matter of their creature comfort.

But the way of escape from the valley was hidden from them always, and they were only set beyond the bounds of the place by the graciousness of the Akatees; and in the end their liberation came by what to all human seeing was the most unlikely of accidents.

They were lying in their hammocks under the trooly thatch for siesta during one blazing noon, when the girl Nora brought a chip of wood and handed it to Commander McTurk.

"What's this, my dear?" said he, peering at it under the gloom of the thatch. "Why, there's writing on it!" He dropped to his feet and shook the other hammock violently. "Here, turn out and look at that. It's from Lucy Codrington, and she says Nora can show us the way to where she is. By Glory! if she can, I'm going to go there, if all the bucks in this blessed valley try to stop me. Here, come along, man."

But as it turned out they were not stopped or, indeed, in any way hindered. They went out from their benab with the girl leading, and presently were running at a jog-trot across the savannah under a brassy glare of sunshine. They held on to the spinney, where the goat-suckers still called *Who-are-yeou*, and where the bucks had beforetime warned them off with threatening points. But no one stopped their way now. A winding way wormed through the thickets and round the tree-trunks; and there, in the middle, was a clearing, partly planted with cassava, and jewelled all round with hanging orchids. There was a benab in the clearing, and inside, on the edge of a finely woven grass hammock, sat Mrs. Codrington.

"Oh, J. K.," she said, "you are a dear man. I knew you'd find me and take me back, if you had to rake through half South America first. Have you brought a lot of soldiers with you?"

"Don't you worry about the details, Lucy. They're all right. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Moggridge, who's been helping me hunt for you. How long have you been in this Akatee valley, by the way?"

"I've been here all the time. I don't know where it is, of course, or I should have said in my letter." McTurk cursed softly to himself. "You see, when I had finally agreed over my mining property, and had got the papers signed, there was some sort of a row started outside the house that night, and there was a little shooting, and somebody called out to me to put out the lamp so that they couldn't see to aim in through the windows. Well, then, when it was dark, somebody came into the room and slipped a sack over my head and tied me up, and presently I was voyaging off in a hammock for an address unknown."

"You poor little woman!"

"Oh, I pitied myself quite enough, I can tell you. But I was mad to the end of my finger-nails. I couldn't help remembering that you'd prophesied down at Santa Barbara that I should get into a mess if I did come up here, and—well——"

Commander McTurk coughed discreetly. "Never mind that, Lucy."

"But I do. I hate being wrong. And I owe you two dollars and a half."

The tall sailor chuckled. "I should be much obliged if you could pay up that amount. To tell the truth, Moggridge and I have run rather short of ready cash, and I guess there's a bill owing for our board up at the hotel here. Hullo, colonel, where did you spring up from? And where in Glory did you get those clothes?"

The Akatee chief stepped into the benab, took off a sombrero, bowed to Mrs. Codrington, and laughed. He was rigged out in spruce white

ducks, and wore a gilt-fringed sash and pipe-clayed shoes.

"Good afternoon, Captain McTurk. Afternoon, Moggridge."—He spoke perfect English with a certain quaint, precise accent.

Moggridge was peering at the man with short-sighted eyes that fairly goggled. "By Crumbs!" he said, "but it's John Brown."

"The clothes from the Oxford point of view," said the Akatee, "evidently make the man. You've had plenty of views of John Brown's body since you've been in this valley, without recognising it."

"Obviously."

"I don't think it was very good taste, the way you openly hankered after my skull when I was walking out with you. I remember you were a good deal on the ethnographical tack, even at Balliol."

"You couldn't expect a man to guess who you were. By the way, what are you?"

"Where we are at present," said Brown, "I am Mrs. Codrington's host"—he bowed towards the hammock—"and I have done my best, under very awkward circumstances, to make her comfortable, though I am sure she has had to put up with many privations."

"I have to thank Mr. Brown for every courtesy that a gentleman could possibly show."

"Outside I am merely native chief of these Akatee Indians."

"But if you're an Oxford man," said McTurk, "how in Glory did you get detailed for that billet?"

"Right of conquest. I killed my predecessor. As a point of fact I came from this country originally. I'm a full-blooded Akatee Indian, Captain McTurk, but I was caught by some infernal missionaries when I was a boy and sent to England and brought up there. I was what they call sharp, I suppose, and as a punishment they gave me the curse of education. Then they sent me out here to be a missionary, to teach the poor heathen to wear clothes and get pneumonia. Well, I got about full up on civilisation in two years, and went back to the forest again. You see the shape of the skull, that interests Moggridge so, makes an Akatee rather unadaptable."

"Then have you adopted—er—all the customs of the country?"

"You've seen me play at part of them for yourself. By the way, you were quite right to chuck that gold lump in the water. My fellows would have sliced you into cutlets if you had looked pleased or pocketed it.—Yes, I've quite gone back to Indian customs, outside this clearing of course. It doesn't do to mix up the Indian and the white man; I learned that thoroughly at Balliol; and so if the white man presses his way in here without invitation he has to take the consequences."

"We heard," Commander McTurk admitted, "that you'd your own simple way of discouraging alien immigration."'

"Quite so. I was quite pleased to rasp up Moggridge's nerves a bit over that point, in return for the extremely bad time he gave me at Oxford."

"Here, I say," said Moggridge, "I didn't chum with you up there, but I didn't meddle with you."

"You called me 'Lo, the poor Indian,' and 'Lo' I remained. Also you measured up my head for some infernal museum or other and read a paper on it. Great Heavens, man, do you think I didn't feel that I was a natural curiosity amongst you all, without having it rubbed further in? As for being in a funk, I know you were, because Nora, as you call her, who happens to be my wife, told me all about it. She quite enjoyed listening to you when Captain McTurk wasn't flirting with her."

Commander McTurk cleared his throat. "Ahem!" he said.

"Ahem," said Mrs. Codrington.

"I understand," said the Indian, "that there is some sort of an understanding between you two. If you'd care to be married, I shall be happy to officiate. I suppose I am still in orders, unless somebody has unfrocked me, and, anyway, I do what marrying's done in this valley. I fancy it would be legal enough."

"I shouldn't dream of permitting such a thing," said Mrs. Codrington quickly.

"Very well, then. I'll leave you now, and go and make arrangements for your transport to the navigable portion of the river. You will move from here as soon as night falls."

* * * * *

In Santa Barbara a month later the three were looked upon as people come back from the dead. The news of the kidnapping of Mrs. Codrington

had come but slowly down country, and on its heels had arrived tidings of the massacre by the untamable Akatee Indians, under circumstances of unspeakable savagery, of every living soul in the neighbourhood of the mines. Rumour had it that a renegade white man had led the slaughter, and none of the three felt called upon to correct that rumour.

Chapter X

THE McMECHIE SUBMARINE

The thousand tiny wrinkles which seamed Commander McTurk's red face deepened with perplexity, and he rubbed the end of his long nose with a vigorous forefinger till it shone again. "Of course I quite agree," he said, "that it would be a splendid subject to write a report upon to the Secretary of the Navy Board at Washington, whether the thing was a frost or whether it was a success. But I don't see that it's in my line. I'm a sailor, and on the top of the water I'm open to handling anything that floats, and can carry it through any weather. But these diving machines are outside my scope, and my tip to you is to get an engineer to handle yours."

Mr. McMechie rolled a black-and-yellow eye, and dropped the borrowed Scottish speech, that he had been using up to now, for an accent that was more native to him. "My boy, you can bet your thweet life I have thought that all out. I want you on board and in command becauthe you are thtraight, not becauthe you are a clever engineer. I can get plenty of clever men, and all that I know would thell me ath thoon ath look at me."

"McMechie," said Commander McTurk, "if you hold such a gloomy view of your fellow-creatures, I guess it's because your health's bad. You take no exercise, you eat enormously, and you sit in steam-heated rooms till you've a liver on you like a Strasbourg goose. Just you take one box of Lever's Limelight Liver pills, and I'll bet you two dollars and a half you discover your experts can run straight, and you'll not want me at all."

But Mr. Israel McMechie would not be led away from the main subject. "Look here, my boy, I didn't want to tell you till you'd agreed to take the command, but there are rumours about that thubmarine. Pinkertons advithe me that an anarchist group intend to steal her and uthe her against the United Stateth."

Commander McTurk stiffened. "Is that genuine," he rasped, "or merely one of your usual commercial tarradiddles?"

The explanatory palms waved at once. "S'elp me, it's true. My boy, I'll show you Pinkerton'th letter."

Commander McTurk considered his man. For Mr. McMechie's word he had no value whatever: he knew him by unpleasant experience to be sincere and honest to one person only, and that was Israel McMechie; but in this instance he somehow gathered that the plain truth was being told. The black-and-yellow eyes spoke clearly of discomfort, if not fright; and if danger really did threaten any item of the United States Navy, why then, John Kelly McTurk, although he was ignominiously stowed away on the Retired List,

was the one man in all North America who would most blithely offer his body to be a buffer for its defence.

"You can detail me," he said, "for the job."

Mr. McMechie regarded his friend with a puzzled look. "There," he said, "I knew that would clinch you. And perthonally, if I had been in your place, it is just the thing that would have put me off. It is a great athet in my line of buthineth to be a thound judge of men, and to know exactly what they will do under given thircumstances, even though you can't appreciate their motivth."

"It is a great thing," said Commander McTurk, with cheerful contempt, "to have a country you're proud of, instead of being a United States citizen merely because there is no Judea in 1906, and they won't have you in Russia or Germany or wherever it was you started from. Now let's drop being polite to one another, and get to facts. Show me Pinkerton's letter first of all, and then tell me all you know of what this submarine can do, and be quick about it. I've an appointment to keep in an hour's time."

Now there was a note in Commander McTurk's pocket that puzzled him considerably. It was written in a feminine hand that was straggly and uneducated, and it was ingeniously blotted in places where the spelling was uncertain. It ran:

"*Dear J. K.,*

"*I hear you are in town, and must see you. What hapened at Newport is being talked about, and you will have to see me clear. You remember*

you give me a definite promise, you old sweet, and I know your just too delishious a boy to be less good than your word. So as soon as you get this, come right along to

"Amy."

"Now, who in Glory," muttered Commander McTurk as he read this letter, "is Amy? Of course," he admitted ruefully to himself, "I have been forty times in Newport, and certainly I've had great times there. But it is just an impossible thing to keep track of them all. If one meets a pretty woman one has to be decently civil to her, for the credit of the Navy if for no other reason. But, dash it—'Amy'! Which in Glory was Amy? Now, if I was only one of those systematic fellows, like McMechie, that keeps a diary, I could get back on to the track of her. But as it is I don't see anything for it except paying that call."

"Not a very high-toned address," he commented, after taking another look at the letter. "But," he added, with ready pity, "perhaps she's down on her luck, poor girl, and that's all the more reason I should go and see what I can do."

The house, when he got to it, was a great block of flats, subdivided into infinitesimal apartments. Slatternly children played on the stair; slatternly women discussed millinery in the hallways. The atmosphere seemed to be compounded of equal parts of patchouli and the emanations from gas cookers. The few men who were about carried the furtive look of those whose

work is at night, and who keep out of the penitentiary only so long as they can afford to bribe the police.

The tall, spruce, dandified figure of Commander J. K. McTurk drew the stares of all and the comments of most of them, but he was answered civilly enough when he asked for a direction to the number he sought.

As a sign that he was expected, the door was opened with singular promptness, and he saw—well, at any rate, no Amy of his acquaintance.

The lady at the door wore rice powder and rouge on her cheeks, and antimony round her eyes. Her hair spoke eloquently of soda; her dress was conspicuously in advance of the fashion; her manner was exuberantly friendly.

"You'll be Capt'n McTurk, I guess? Come right in, capt'n. I saw that letter from Amy, and I know it's that that brought you. You come right in, Capt'n McTurk, and lemme shut the door, so's all the stair shan't hear. You can't see Amy just yet, but I'll try vury hard to entertain you in the meanwhile."

"May I ask——"

"For an introduction? Why, cert'nly, Capt'n McTurk. You'll know me vury well by name, I am Maddemoselle Mahry de Maupassong."

"Pleasure," murmured the sailor.

"Oh, not at all. Sit down on the sofa, do. You see, that's the best of being an artiste: everybody knows you. I guess I've seen you looking on at my turn many a golden time, eh, capt'n? So in a way we were properly introdooced, and on intimate terms already. Mahry, you may call

me, if you like: they all do. Would you like a bottle of wine? I can send out for one."

Commander McTurk civilly declined refreshment, but was at a loss for further conversation. He was racking his brain harder than ever to try to remember who the Amy of his correspondence might be. He could think of none of his former acquaintance likely to be a friend of this tawdry, cheerful actress.

There was no check to the flow of her talk. "Of course," she went on, "as we haven't met what you might call intimately before, you must always have thought me French, and I guess you now see for yourself you were dead wrong. I'm just as Amurican as you, capt'n. But 'Maddemoselle' looks well on the bills, and makes about twenty-five cents in the dollar difference to my professional salary. I can see by your looks that you don't think this red satin costoome suits me; but then, it's not clothes, it's my shape that's generally most admired."

Commander McTurk wiped bashful perspiration from his forehead. "Er—you see, Miss de Maupassant—er—beg pardon, Mademoiselle—I'm hardly a judge of . . . Well, you see, to tell the truth, I came up here to see an old friend."

"And you find it dull work filling in time with me till she comes?" suggested the lady coquettishly. "It's the red costume you can't stand, and you're right. It hardly suits a blonde like me. Now, if I'd only put on my blue, I reckon you'd have asked me to send out for that bottle of wine without my even suggesting it, and we'd have talked about Amy and old times till the

cows came home. All the boys like talking to me."

"I'm sure they do."

"And you are one of the boys," hummed Miss de Maupassant, and added a few steps of a sand-dance to illustrate the sentiment. "Won't you light your cigar, Capt'n McTurk, and not sit on the edge of the sofa as though you still didn't feel quite at home?"

Commander McTurk stood to his feet. "I'm afraid," he said stiffly, "I've trespassed too long on your kindness already. As my friend—er——"

"The Amy whose surname you can't for the life of you recollect."

McTurk stared. "Have it that way if you like. As she is not at home I must postpone the pleasure of my call till a future occasion. To tell the truth, I am due to join my ship in another hour from now, and that is an appointment which cannot be put off."

He moved towards the door, but the actress was quicker. She jumped for the key, turned it, pulled it out, and dangled it for a moment in front of Commander McTurk's long nose, and then, after fumbling for an elusive pocket amongst the red satin folds, dropped it securely out of sight.

"My Glory! Madam——"

"Maddemoselle, if it's all the same to you, capt'n."

"Y'know, you mustn't do that. As I have told you, my professional duties make it impossible for me to stop any longer."

"And I say you're going to be real nice, and

stay and talk to me all the afternoon, till it's time for me to go to my theatre. You can't get the key without taking it out of my pocket, and I know you're too much of a gentleman to do that."

"Thank you, but I intend to go. I came here to see a lady by appointment."

"Oh, shucks! You knew there wasn't any Amy all along."

Commander McTurk stared. "On my honour I didn't. But who wrote the letter, then? It must have been sent by some one who knew me intimately. It began—er—well, it began in a way that only my intimates address me."

"It began 'Sweetest J. K.,' didn't it, capt'n? Well, that's no evidence. Don't you think that half the United States by this time knows that J. K. stands for John Kelly McTurk? My! but you are modest."

The sailor eyed the door, and measured up its strength.

"You'd much better stay here and chatter with me than go and get into trouble in that nasty submarine."

"What's that?"

"Well, I shouldn't have mentioned it, perhaps; but if you'll take the cinch from me, you'll be glad you let that submarine alone. She wouldn't have been healthy for you."

Now, Commander McTurk was very tall, and people overlooked much of his weight and most of his strength. Bursting the door would have been an easy matter to him if it had been twice as strong. As a matter of fact, it was flimsy to a

degree, and he emerged into the passage beyond, framed in the door's ruins, at a much greater pace than he had intended. The actress shouted after him the hot words which were native to her in moments of stress, but the other occupants of the flats took little enough notice. Some even turned their backs, as though they feared to be called upon subsequently as witnesses. One gathered that the neighbourhood was used to these little angry displays.

But Commander McTurk paid small enough heed to the feelings of any one who dwelt in that tenement. The hint that had been given him by Mr. Israel McMechie; the fact that this de Maupassant woman had let slip a knowledge of the submarine; the further fact that he had obviously been lured out of some one's way: these things all pointed at trouble ahead for the new boat. And in Commander McTurk's mind that trouble was inseparably connected with damage and disaster for the United States Navy.

There was a hack in the street outside, and a driver lolled on the box with idleness and impudence written all over him. Commander McTurk gave that man ten words of instructions and one look, and got curt civility and speed in return. "I'll be the slave of no man, let alone a great long red-faced beggar like that," the driver kept muttering resentfully to himself. But all the same he continued to urge his horse along at the top of its speed. It was a fine tribute to the sailor's power of command.

They drove with furious haste down to the wharf, and a glance told McTurk that the sub-

marine had left her berth. For a moment even he almost despaired. If she had been an ordinary vessel, he would have hired another steamer and been after her at once. But one cannot chase on the high seas a craft which can cheerfully upon occasion wallow along amongst the crabs on the sea floor.

Then a shouting caught his ear, and farther along he saw a crowd staring intently down at something that moved along in the water below them.

He ran to that crowd with long-legged strides. Yes, sure enough there was the submarine making for the open sea. Behind him the hackman lashed his horse and bellowed for his fare; around him the crowd jostled, and cursed when he trod on them; but he paid small enough attention to the one or the other. The submarine was gaining more speed every instant, and was heading out into the fairway. He ran up level with her, stepped on to the string-piece of the wharf, and sprang outward with all his strength. His feet and legs sent up a fountain of spray from the water; his knees crashed against the curve of the vessel's skin; but his hands clenched upon the rail round the superstructure, and in another three seconds he was inboard, and his clothes dripped upon the steel decking.

On shore the crowd cheered and laughed: there is always something comic—to the onlookers—in a pierhead jump. On the submarine his arrival produced something very near to consternation. There were two men in high seaboots and heavy clothing on the narrow deck,

and both of these shouted down the open hatchway news of the arrival.

"Curse that fool Marie!" rumbled a voice from down below. "I bet she put on some flaming scarlet frock or other, and that and her peroxide hair scared him away before she got the door locked. This group gets wrecked on a woman every time it trusts one."

But the speaker got no further with his complaint. A very furious Commander J. K. McTurk jumped down the round hatchway almost on to the top of him, and raspingly demanded the meaning of this premature start.

The little knock-kneed fellow collected his wits quickly enough, and answered with easy coolness: "Just orders, captain. Word was sent down we were to run a trial this afternoon, and though we expected you certainly, there had been nothing definite said, and so I obeyed previous instructions. Do you supersede me in the command?"

"I must ask your name?"

"Schuster."

"Then, Mr. Schuster, you may take it that I do."

"If that's the case you'd better catch hold of the wheel." And before McTurk could stop him, the little man, with his deformed knees twinkling grotesquely in and out, moved rapidly away towards the boat's interior.

Now Commander J. K. McTurk was for the moment in a position of considerable difficulty. Submarine boats he had encountered on paper, but he had never explored one which was a sea-

going proposition. Furthermore, this particular craft, as McMechie had boasted to him, was a very considerable departure from former submarine practice.

He got the feel of her with the electric steering-wheel, and, looking out at the anchored shipping through the thick windows of the conning-tower, he saw that she answered to her helm very sharply, and judged that she would be an awkward craft to handle in a sea way. But whilst he was doing this, he had called down one of the men from the deck, and handed over the wheel. If, as he strongly suspected, the crew of his new command were in a state of incipient mutiny against him, J. K. McTurk was no man to put off coming to hand-grips with them.

So he stepped down from the conning-tower platform, squirmed his great length down a narrow, twisted alleyway of steel, and came upon Schuster and another man working with desperate haste in the forward torpedo-room.

The boat's interior dinned with noise. It was full of the coughing of her gasoline engines, and thrilled with the hum of her electric motors, and the men did not hear him. But in a glance Commander McTurk saw what they were doing. Schuster was fitting a dummy practice-head to a Whitehead torpedo. They had evidently just unfitted the warhead, and the other man was stowing this, with its tremendous charge of gun-cotton, out of sight in a locker.

It took, as I say, but a glance to pick up the whole scene, and Commander McTurk drew back down the alleyway unnoticed. He went aft

and inspected the gyroscope and the engine-rooms, and all, so far as he saw, was in order there.

Then he went out again on deck, and the thousand tiny wrinkles which seamed his red face deepened with perplexity. McMechie's hint; the letter from "Amy," and Miss de Maupassant's action thereon; the departure of the submarine without him; the presence of warheads on the torpedoes of a craft that had not been sold to any Government, but was indeed only out to run a trial: all these things pointed to something radically wrong. But what was it? For the life of him he could not see.

The submarine was lifting now over the beginning of the outside swell, and half her superstructure was awash; she was followed by curious eyes; but presently she would be beyond the rut of the coastal traffic, in some great loneliness of the outer sea, or, indeed, perhaps tucked away beneath its surface; and what might happen there? McTurk was one, and he was armed only with his most capable fists. The other men numbered six, and he could guarantee that every one of them carried knife or pistol, or both. Commander J. K. McTurk knew the breed.

A less daring man would have made a hard struggle to have had the submarine headed in for the land without any further delay—for, presumably, once at sea, he would be powerless against a combination of six, if they intended mischief. But, as he argued to himself, if he did put back for the shore, he would still be without knowledge of what had been plotted: they would equally be

free to carry out their design, whatever that might be; and so he gave no order for any change of course, but stood on out to sea, brazenly ready to encounter whatever might befall.

The weather was getting heavier; the cold Atlantic spindrift whistled in hail-storms over the submarine's superstructure; but Commander McTurk, as he clung there to the base of the periscope, was not without his compensations. He was thinking out the headings of a luscious report he would now be able to send in to the Secretary of the Navy Board at Washington on "The Dangers, both in Peace and War, of Unauthorised Crews getting possession of Armed Submarines." He felt that a valuable report like this would go very far to reinstating him on the Active List, from which his name had remained continuously absent since that fatal time when for the good of the United States he had "exceeded instructions" in the Philippines.

Now, the names of the actual port of departure and of the harbour where the outrage was attempted are omitted in these memoirs for very obvious reasons, as are also the date and names of the ships which made up the visiting British Cruiser Squadron. But Commander McTurk, on being told by Schuster that the McMechie Company wished the boat to be tested in such and such a way, and then be brought up in a certain harbour, made up his mind to add to this programme a thorough test of her sea-keeping powers.

It is an accepted fact that a submarine in a seaway is the most uncomfortable vehicle yet

commented upon in naval annals, and Commander McTurk grimly thanked Providence for his own personal toughness. He kept the boat unsubmerged; he threshed her through seas that were always within an ace of swamping her; and when at last his own cast-steel frame was thoroughly worn out, and not before, he turned her in again for the shore. He reckoned that the rest of the crew would be too exhausted for mischief, and indeed this was the case.

A ghastly faced Schuster came out to him on deck when they had picked up their moorings. "I should have died if you had kept me down there another half-hour."

McTurk much wished that his own strength could have held out for that thirty minutes longer, but he did not say so. He suggested that no one ever believed that a submarine was a pleasure packet, and added, "You may turn in all hands now."

"Not in that stink-hole down there."

"What's that?" rasped Commander McTurk.

Schuster saw his mistake. Here was no mere merchant skipper; here was the naval officer, a man who demanded exact obedience. So he shuffled his knock-knees as straight as they would go, and brought a wearied hand up to the salute. "Orders are orders, sir, and I'll see them carried out if you insist. But the men only signed on for these test runs under the agreement that they were to sleep ashore."

"Well and good. I think the hands on board here understand discipline now. Hail a boat and

get away ashore, the lot of you. I'll keep anchor watch myself."

Schuster was plainly startled. "But if it's not fit for us, it's not fit for you, sir."

"I'm the best judge of that. In the United States Navy no officer ever orders a man to do anything he won't do himself. I ordered you to sleep aboard here; you beg off; I shall sleep here myself, to prove that my order is not unreasonable. That's all. Dismiss the watch."

Schuster was too bone-weary to argue the matter further, even if Commander McTurk's stiff naval manner had admitted of argument—which it did not; the other hands were only too pleased to exchange the hateful submarine for stable land; and presently a passing tug foamed up to their rail, took them off, and foamed away with them to her wharf up the harbour. Commander McTurk, sodden, chilled, wearied, sickened as he was, stepped down through the round hatchway into the hateful atmosphere below, and prepared for a night of tremendous labour.

* * * * *

It was the knock-kneed Schuster who saw him first next morning. He was lying coiled up at the bottom of the tiny conning-tower, to all appearance sleeping like a dead man.

Schuster scratched at his revolver pocket, and turned down to his friends in the boat that had brought them off. "I've a good mind to slip a shot into him right now without further waiting. Say the word, and I'll do it."

"No," said the engineer, who sat at the boat's tiller. "There is a chance the shot might be

heard, and we're here to take no extra risks. We'll dump him overboard at sea this afternoon."

"I'm about full up on his beastly naval bossiness."

"I admit," said the engineer grimly, "that he rather jars on any decent-minded anarchist, but you'll have to put up with him for a few hours longer. As a recompense, I promise you the pleasure of killing the blighter yourself when the time comes. Now hurry up and wake him. The Britishers' ships and their fool prince are due in three hours' time, and the folks ashore here must see us put to sea, or they'll suspect this submarine when the blow-up comes."

Schuster stepped down into the conning-tower, and shook Commander McTurk heavily by the shoulder. That officer snorted and shrugged, and for a full minute refused to wake. Any one with the least knowledge of his habits would have been suspicious; but Schuster knew him not, and accordingly was impressed with the soundness of his sleep.

"Come aboard, sir," the knock-kneed man reported, when at last McTurk sat up and regarded him.

"Very good. Get alongside the hulk, and fill up with gasoline."

"Engineer wants lubricating oil, sir."

"Very good; get lubricating oil, and whatever else is necessary, and see the hands work smartly. We shall put to sea as soon as she is filled up, to repeat the manœuvres of yesterday."

Now, many times during the night Commander

McTurk had felt tempted to seek immediate safety by starting the engines and putting the submarine on the beach out of harm's way. But, as this would leave him still ignorant of what had been intended with her, he resisted the temptation on every occasion, and went on with his other precautions. It was not till the crew returned, and, through the simple device of shamming sleep, he had heard those few words which passed after Schuster's proposal to murder him, that he grasped the truth of what had been plotted. As he sat eating the usual torpedo-man's breakfast of biscuit, and sardines lifted from their native tin by the fingers, he congratulated himself warmly on his waiting policy. A British fleet under a British prince-admiral was due to pay a state visit to the harbour in a few hours' time; these wretched anarchists had schemed to torpedo one or more of the ships, either from sheer wanton love of destruction, or to bring about war between Britain and the States; and if a United States naval officer defeated their scheme when it was within an ace of being carried through, he did not see how any Secretary of a Navy Board at Washington could possibly avoid giving that officer promotion and active employment.

Once made fast to the hulk, he would call the men there to his aid, order up the crew from the submarine, and arrest every soul of them as they came through the hatch. It would be a magnificent coup.

But this very fine plan had one flaw in it, and that presently made itself plain. The hulk was

tenantless. Moreover, as a thing of danger, she was anchored as far away as possible from the rest of the shipping. Even the little bay in which she swung was tenantless. A more desperate situation than Commander McTurk's just then it would have been hard to conceive.

Still, though he was very conscious of his danger, he showed no outward signs of the knowledge. He was the tall, prim, precise naval officer, red of face, curt of speech, accurately watchful of all that went on, and the crew obeyed him with all apparent cheerfulness. They refilled the submarine's fuel tanks with the smartness of experts, relocked the hulk's hatches, cast off from her, and got under way.

In the harbour's entrance they passed the British fleet, eight great stately cruisers in line ahead—enormous ships, the last word of their class in naval defence and destruction, dandified in every detail. The submarine rolled over the swells of the wake of each, and Commander McTurk's professional eye picked out the soft spots where he, as a United States naval officer (in case of war), would aim his Whiteheads, or concentrate his gun-fire. Then they passed astern, and once more his brain worked to the full of its pressure on the problem of how to prevent the murderous scoundrels in the hull below him from dealing out destruction to a fleet that had come in unsuspecting friendship. And in the meantime the routine of the trial went on, with its unemotional changes.

It was the sight of a piece of floating wreckage that gave Commander McTurk the hint for the

desperate scheme by which he saved his life. He was standing on the forward part of the submarine's superstructure himself, and two of the other men were beside the open hatch behind him. Schuster came up from below, saying the atmosphere down there was poisonous, and that he must have a breath of air. The scowling engineer joined them, snarling out the same excuse. McTurk turned and looked, and saw that the four were ripe for murder. Two of them had their fingers on their hips, ready to draw. The engineer and Schuster kept right hands in their jacket pockets that gripped upon obvious revolvers. They were only eight feet away from him. Commander McTurk was balanced for a rush, but on that narrow decking it was a thousand chances to one that he would be shot to a standstill before he could come to hand-grips.

So he slipped his footing, buttocked against the curve of the hull, and slid off into the water. It was the easiest thing in the world to do: the submarine was pitching heavily, and the forward end of her superstructure was constantly sluiced by the seas; and anyway foothold was precarious.

He sank deeply when he fell, and came to the surface twenty fathoms astern. He had not the smallest idea that they would come to pick him up, but by way of carrying out the play he sent forth the routine cry of "Man overboard!'

Actually they slowed the submarine. He saw and heard Schuster call the order down the hatch. Great Heavens! had he been wrong all

the time? Were they going to stop and pick him up?

No, it was not that. The knock-kneed man lifted a revolver and deliberately shot at him—and missed. Then he shot again, and again, sighting the weapon over the crook of his elbow. He was cheered on by his friends, and when his revolver was empty the engineer handed him another.

The submarine rolled to the swell, and McTurk's head was a small mark. The bullets ricochetted viciously through the wave-tops, some wide of the mark, some venomously near. If they practised long enough they were bound to get him—or they could move the boat nearer and shoot at a shorter range.

The tall sailor looked desperately round at the floating wreckage. It was the after-deckhouse of some old barque, green painted, green also in its lower parts with a growth of sea vegetables.

He made for it with rapid side-strokes, climbed its precarious sides, and from that swaying vantage-point hurled vitriolic abuse at the crew of the submarine, and stood their shot. Then of a sudden he yelled shrilly, threw up his arms, and fell backwards with a sounding splash into the sea. Even then the anarchists wanted to make sure, and steered their vessel round the wreckage, searching the water narrowly for the corpse.

But they assured themselves that all that was left of Commander McTurk had sunk, and so they went below, closed the hatch, got the submarine into diving trim, and with their conning-tower just awash, made for the harbour and the anchored

British fleet, with minds gloating over the coming tragedy with which they would horrify civilisation.

From within the clammy weed-grown deck-house, a shivering Commander McTurk watched them go out of sight under the curve of the sea, and then once more he dived out into the open. The wreckage swayed as he climbed again on to its upper parts, and some seafowl that had scented his presence and foreseen a meal flew away mewing with disappointment.

He shuddered at the biting chill of the wind, and flapped his arms vigorously against his ribs to gather warmth. He was clear away from his would-be murderers certainly, but still he was in no very desirable plight. The low-lying American coast was down out of sight; he floated in no ship track; and though some tacking coaster might come within sight, he was so inconsiderable a speck on the face of the great Western Ocean that any vessel might easily pass within a mile and placidly neglect him.

Here, then, was a state of things to be remedied at once. A beading ran round the edge of the house. He got his fingers under an end of this where the nails had rusted, and pulled three lengths of it adrift. He would have given large money just then for a handfull of rope-yarn, but as none was forthcoming, he peeled off his linen shirt, tore that into narrow strips, plaited these into five-ply sennit with a sailor's deftness, and so spliced the three lengths of beading into one long mast. He decorated the head of this with his waistcoat, jammed the heel of his spar in the hole where once the stovepipe of the bogie had passed,

and flung out a flag-message to the winds whose import no passing mariner could misunderstand.

And almost immediately came his reward. A smoke blew up over the landward horizon, mast trucks rose after it, and presently there bustled up at eighteen knots, in a winking splendour of enamel and silver-plating, the fine 3,000-ton ocean-going steam yacht of Mr. Israel McMechie.

A stout, agitated figure explained inaudible words with waving hands at the port end of her upper bridge; and beside this figure stood another in electric-blue dress and canary-yellow hat and motor-veil, which also carried tidings to McTurk's recollection. A manned boat swung smartly down from davits the moment the yacht lost her way.

"My dear boy," said McMechie, as Commander McTurk came in over the gangway, "what hath happened?"

"I've got my feet rather wet, and I've had to spoil a good linen shirt. I shall indent on you for that shirt, McMechie, and while I think of it, I believe I shall stick you for a suit of clothes as well. Good afternoon, Miss de Maupassant—Mademoiselle, I should say. Didn't expect to see you out here to-day. I must apologise for the sudden way I had to leave you yesterday, but I'd a very special business engagement to keep. Well, McMechie, what is it? Why don't you tell your skipper to turn in for home? You'll be late for dinner if you don't look out, and there'll be a tragedy."

"Don't talk of tragedy to me, my boy. I don't think I shall ever dare to go back to the United Stateth after this."

"And I'm sure Scotland won't suit you. They don't appreciate Caledonians of your descent in bonny Scotland. But what's wrong with the United States, anyway?"

"The British fleet is destroyed, and by the McMechie submarine boat."

"Who says so?"

"This lady, Marie—she inthithts on my calling her Marie."

"You haven't actually seen it blown up, then?"

Mr. McMechie sank into a chair, and relapsed into inarticulate wavings and shrugs.

Miss de Maupassant took up the tale. "I behaved real mean to you, Capt'n McTurk, and I'm here right now to say I'm sorry. You see, it was this way. A gentleman friend of mine—at least, I only met him that evening, but he stood supper, and so I call him a friend—well, he said you were great after girls, and you were going to take one out on a submarine one afternoon, and it would be a great wheeze if you didn't keep the appointment, and he kept it for you. See?"

"I'm afraid I don't, altogether," said Commander McTurk stiffly. "Perhaps you'll explain further?"

"Cert. He says to me, 'Mahry, my girl'—y'know, they all call me Mahry—'if you'll keep the captain in tow for the whole afternoon, I'll make it a diamond and opal ring.' See? And then he told me how to work that racket about Amy. Now you must confess, capt'n, that the Amy wheeze was a bit of all right, eh?"

"The letter said that some one was in trouble, and I came to see what it was, and what I could do."

"Well, it was rather a dirty trick to bring you that way, but I didn't think of it at the time. You see it was the diamond and opal ring I'd got in my mind, and the worst is I shan't see anything of that now."

"If owing to my violence your friend wouldn't pay up, I think I see my way to making good the loss. I rather gather I owe it to you that McMechie's yacht turned up to take me off that damp deckhouse?"

"In a way, yes. You see, my friend—if you would call him a friend—when he came to see me yesterday afternoon, was arrested for being an anarchist, and I was warned by the police, which I say is a bit of impudence on their part. Wouldn't you call it impudence to warn a lady in my position that she mustn't be an anarchist?"

"Most unwarrantable."

"So I saw some of my friend's friends, and they seemed to think I was mixed up in the same boat, and they let plump out that some of their lot was going to blow up the British fleet and that old prince. Well, of course that was nothing to do with me, much; but they let on, too, that you'd have to be killed as well, capt'n, just to keep you quiet, and that made me go cold all over. I assure you it did, quite cold and clammy. Ugh!"

"I am sure I apologise."

"Don't you laugh now. It was dead serious. I didn't let on to them, of course, but as soon as I could get away I changed into this blue frock, as I could see you hated the red one, and I came right straight to Mr. McMechie here, and a very pleasant gentleman I found him. We've been

following you ever since. We heard of you filling up at the hulk this morning, and then we steamed straight out to sea looking for you."

"Mademoiselle, I'll see that that diamond and opal ring is a beauty. You're just a splendid girl. Isn't she, McMechie?"

Mr. McMechie rolled a black-and-yellow eye. "She wath too late. The thubmarine hath ethcaped. Even by now, two or three of thothe beautiful British cruithers will have been dethtroyed."

Commander McTurk laughed rather grimly. "Don't you believe it. I had a bit of time alone on that submarine, and I took out all the gun-cotton from the warheads of the torpedoes, and threw most of it overboard. Then I made up the heads to the right weight with spare lead accumulator plates, and put them back where I found them."

"Er—you say you threw most of the gun-cotton overboard? You kept thome?"

"I put just four cakes against the outer end of the torpedo tube. I guess, McMechie, if those rapscallions try to loose off a torpedo under water it'll blow the end of their craft into the sea. I'd hate to have you lose that boat——"

"Oh, don't mention it," beamed Mr. McMechie. "I never felt tho pleathed over a loth in my life. Come below and have thome champagne. And I'll give you the biggetht thigar you ever thaw. You'll come too, my dear?"

"You bet your sweet old life," said Miss de Maupassant gracefully. "My! Capt'n, but I am real glad I waited to change my frock. You did hate seeing me in that red."

Chapter XI

KIDNAPPED

To a certain extent Mr. Israel McMechie was taken humorously in those circles of New York in which he moved. Any gentleman of unmixed Hebrew descent, who has the impudence to exchange the ancestral patronymic of Moses for a name taken from a land where no Jew could ever make a livelihood, always presents some elements of fun. And when, in addition, he adopts an accent of the broadest Doric for social intercourse, and only falls back on the tribal lisp and hand-wave for moments of stress and emotion, it may be conceived how many people—mostly of the non-business sex—regarded him chiefly as a figure of drollery.

But there was a large section of the population of Eastern America who looked upon Mr. McMechie with very lively feelings of hatred, and these included the larger portion of those who had done business with the McMechie Chemical and Explosives Company, the McMechie Shipbuilding Company, the McMechie Tobacco Trust, or with the various other concerns in which Mr. Israel McMechie held the controlling interest. When the scare headlines of the newspaper announced Kidnapping of McMechie:

MILLIONAIRE HELD TO RANSOM: and THREATS OF MUTILATION, some of the people hoped the kidnappers would at least cut his ears off, and the most lenient of them trusted that the rogues would squeeze the old robber good and hard, whilst they had the chance.

If any attempts were being made at tracking and rescue, none of these appeared on the surface, and Miss McTurk thought it probable that if Commander John Kelly McTurk had not seen fit to take up the matter into his own most capable hands, the kidnappers would have proceeded to extremities, or have had everything their own way.

As a point of accurate fact, it was Miss Bridget McTurk who decided first that Mr. McMechie should be rescued. She had not (as local scandal sometimes suggested) an atom of tenderness for the man, and though it cannot be denied that she had flirted with him outrageously, still that is no evidence of affection. Unchangeable history records the fact that throughout all her life Miss Bridget McTurk had flirted with every man she came across who would flirt with her.

"I have decided," she said, "that you shall go and find the poor creature."

"I wish," retorted her tall brother, "that you'd attend more carefully to your hair, Bridget. That front's adrift again."

Miss McTurk faced the glass, and pinned a row of yellow curls back into place. "I'm trying some new hairpins the barber asked me to report upon. I told him I thought they would be too slippery, and they are."

"If you aren't more careful," said her brother

irritably, "you'll drop part of your hair in the street one of these days."

"I've done that before now, but I didn't lose sleep over it."

"Then you ought to have done. Why on earth can't you have your hair all in a piece, like mine?"

Miss McTurk regarded her brother's head with a critical eye. "Y'know, J. K., there's no getting over the fact that it looks exactly like a wig, and I honestly believe that the McMechie creature is the only living soul that has never been taken in with it. I heard him only a week ago assuring some young fellows who were speaking of you as Wiggy McTurk——"

"Curse their impudence."

"Precisely. He did. And he guaranteed to them that the entire crop was grown on the premises. How about that?"

Commander McTurk smiled with open boyish pleasure, and his sister winked complacently to herself, and felt sure that a kindly Heaven would forgive the tarradiddle.

"Of course McMechie has made use of me—I know that quite well, Bridget; and once or twice he's got at me pretty badly. I suppose that's because he's a commercial man, and I'm not. But he's not a bad sort on the whole. How much of this newspaper report do you suppose is true? A tenth?"

"Haven't a notion, boy. You'd better go and find out for yourself."

"If it proved a long job," said Commander McTurk doubtfully, "I don't know whether I

could spare the time. You see, when a man's on the Retired List of the Navy——"

"Pulling McMechie out of a scrape is just the way to bring your name before the Secretary of the Navy Board at Washington, and get him to enter it on the Active List right then. Don't forget that the McMechie Shipbuilding Company are building two cruisers for the United States Government, and if through McMechie's absence the Company gets embarrassed, it would be a very bad thing for the country. For goodness' sake, boy, don't rub the end of that long nose of yours so hard. You've made it shine till I can see myself in it.—What was that you said, John Kelly McTurk? Kindly repeat that last word. No, I thought you wouldn't. And now you've gone away nice and ruffled! Well, you're just in the mood now to go and dig after Mr. McMechie."

Miss McTurk turned her eyes away from the door when it had closed on her brother's retreating form, and looked with contempt at the canvas on which he had been endeavouring to put down with a palette knife his impressions of a sunset with a stormy sea. Then she heaped the tubes of paint on to the middle of the picture, and put the lot away in a bottom drawer.

"Yes," she said, to his photograph on the mantelpiece, "if I hadn't stirred you up you'd have wasted all to-day and perhaps half to-morrow on a picture that no one could guess the meaning of when it was done. As it is, you may do yourself some good. My! but I do know how to manage you, J. K."

Now, the difference between reading in the yellow press that a man has been kidnapped, and finding out details from those more intimately connected with him, may conveniently be very great. Commander McTurk called at all the offices where he knew Mr. McMechie to have interests, made his inquiries, and was politely shown out of each with no addition to his stock of knowledge. Yes, they had seen what was stated in the papers: no, they had nothing further to add: no, of course they understood that Captain McTurk was entirely dissociated from the qualified press. But still they had no fresh information to give him.

So there was only the kidnappers' statement to go upon—namely, that Mr. Israel McMechie was "detained in a place of perfect security, where there was not the least chance of his friends discovering him." As Commander McTurk stepped from the elevator, and walked out into the jostling crowds of Broadway, he put himself into the kidnappers' position, and tried to imagine where he would hide a man supposing he had stolen him.

He crossed the road, dodging, with a seaman's nervousness, the cars and the rest of the furious traffic, and arrived at the farther side-walk splashed and ruffled. "I bet two dollars and a half I shall come to an end by being run down at some infernal city crossing," he grumbled. "No one cares a cent here who you are, or whether you are alive or dead. Yes, by Glory! if I wanted to hide a man, I'd hire a room right down here, and put him in it, and lock the door.

Nobody would give two thoughts as to what was behind that door, so long as I was regular in payment of rent." He stared up at the enormous buildings, and realised the hopelessness of a search without a clue. "Won't do," he told himself: "there's a heap too much of New York for that game."

And then an idea leaped up into his brain that was so beautifully simple that he was annoyed it had not occurred to him before. He must go and see Mosenthal.

Now Mr. Mosenthal was a stout Semitic gentleman, who was an old acquaintance of Commander McTurk's. They had met first over that matter of business in the Yellow Sea, and they had come across one another at rare intervals since. Mr. Mosenthal was quite the confidential man with Mr. McMechie, and some said a sort of partner.

It was growing dark when the idea came to McTurk, and so he posted off up-town, and by various gradations came to Mr. Mosenthal's sumptuous flat.

At first, according to the servant, Mr. Mosenthal was at home. Then he sent down word to say that he was engaged.

"Eh! what's that?" rasped Commander McTurk. "The fellow won't see me? Here, you: stand out of my way. You can attend to shutting the door. I'll announce myself."

He found his man slippered and shawled, and packed into the embraces of a big armchair. "Oh, that's where you are, is it, Mr. Mosenthal? I got a message to say you were engaged."

"So I was engaged, captain—with grippe."

"That's being sick, not engaged. It's a pity you can't slip into the habit of telling the accurate truth sometimes. Well, I didn't come here to inquire after your health, or to try and improve your morals. I want to know where McMechie is."

"S'elp me, captain, I haven't hidden him."

"I didn't say you had. I didn't come here supposing you knew where he was. But I intend to find him, and I know you can give me some pointers as to how to start. For instance, nobody owns up to having seen him since you and he parted.

Mosenthal shook a tired head. "There's no mystery there. When I left him he was boarding a Brooklyn car. He'd an appointment with the Taypay Explosives Company of Brooklyn, who had asked to be taken into our combine."

"Well?"

"That's all. He seems to have evaporated from then onwards. No conductor or passenger appears to remember having seen him on the cars."

"Well, man, go on. Did you call up the Taypay Explosives to see if he landed there?"

"Naturally. Their answer was simple. They said he hadn't come, and they hadn't expected him. They seemed surprised we asked. And when they were told about their letter, it was the first they had heard of that either. They had not the smallest desire to have any truck with Mr. Israel McMechie, or to come into the combine. The whole thing was a fake."

"By Glory!" snapped Commander McTurk

with sudden violence, "I believe that for once you have really dropped into telling the truth."

The man in the chair stared at him with dull eyes."

"And I'll tell you why," his tall visitor went on. "First you say McMechie mentioned this letter to you before he boarded that Brooklyn car. Then you tell me the Taypay Explosives Company know nothing about the letter. Well, that's a lie on the face of it. And because why? Because, my lad, you are the Taypay Explosives. I was told that in the way of ordinary conversation no later than this very afternoon."

"Great Abraham!" said Mr. Mosenthal limply.

"Now I give you your choice: will you have me ring up the police, and that means you leave this elegant flat *en route* for the penitentiary; or will you hand over McMechie? And mind, he's to be produced all in one piece. If you've commenced slicing off his ears, as the papers say is the case, don't expect me to protect you."

"Have you ever had grippe?" asked the other, with a weary shiver. "Because if you have, you can understand me when I say that you may shoot me right now if it amuses you, and I shan't care a continental."

"It's no use your pulling out the pathetic stop too far. Either produce McMechie or to penitentiary you go, even if it has to be in an ambulance."

"'Pallida grippe,'" misquoted Mr. Mosenthal, "'æquo pulsat pede, tabernas pauperum, millionaire-que turres.' This would have been the

biggest scoop of my life, and here am I knocked endways by disease. It's been the one plum I've been working for ever since I left Princeton, to get hold of a millionaire and squeeze him good and hard. It's the one thing that made me endure the beastly years I spent in McMechie's service. The man's worth his five millions at the very lowest, and a day ago I wouldn't have taken two for my share. And now, Holy Abraham! I've got a mere bag of aches and shudders on my shoulders instead of a head to carry it through. Captain McTurk, I surrender. Will you ring the bell for some tea, and perhaps that will pull me round enough to talk business to you?"

Mr. Mosenthal put his hands to his head and groaned, and Commander McTurk rang the bell. It seemed brutal to press the man further, and besides, he had gained his point. McMechie was to be given up.

In due time the tea came, and McTurk poured out a cup for the sufferer. "There is no sugar here, by the way."

"Thanks, you are very good, captain. Milk only, please. Never take sugar—only saccharine; but I guess I couldn't manage even that to-day. But you do, of course, and they haven't brought any. Stupid idiots. Well, you'll find saccharine just as sweet, and it's much better for you. The tabloids are in that Sèvres jar on the mantelshelf. But I suppose you are one of those great healthy creatures with a scorn for everything that savours of the druggist's store? They'll bring you sugar if you ring."

"On the contrary," said Commander McTurk,

mounting quickly upon his hobby, "I have found many medicines a very great help. A sailor, you know, gets into many sickly climates, and has to eat much unwholesome food, and if he doesn't look after himself he soon goes sick. I've been very successful in avoiding that sort of trouble; I've retained the best of health; and I flatter myself I've become a pretty considerable authority on drugs generally during the process."—He took three of the white tabloids from the Sèvres jar, and stirred them into his tea. "I don't know whether you ever read the advertisements of Blue Shield Febrifuge, but you'll find a testimonial from me amongst them saying that I can strongly recommend it. You see grippe is a sort of malaria, to my way of thinking, and I'm sure if you'll let me send out for a bottle of Blue Shield, it would cure you whilst you wait."

"Thanky, captain, you're very good. When we go out together presently, we'll drop into a drug-store and buy what you like. But at present I'm suffering badly from 'that tired feeling,' and if you can spare time for a half-hour's nap I shall be very greatly your debtor."

"Oh, sleep away," said Commander McTurk goodnaturedly, and sipped up his tea, and poured himself out another cup. "I'll just borrow this paper block and do a bit of sketching till you're ready. I've got a box of colour chalks in my pocket."

* * * * *

The conversation had been a fairly lengthy one, and most of it had passed unheeded. Just two words, and two only, had hung in Commander

McTurk's memory. "Knock-out drops," one man had said, and presently the other repeated something more about certain mysterious "knock-out drops."

It was hard to hear what else they said. The place was packed with noise. When one came to analyse it, the noise was like the roar of a head-sea outside thin steel plating. Commander McTurk was very sleepy, but he wondered much what the crashing roar of seas and the raw smell of wet boots had to do with Mr. Mosenthal's luxurious flat. But it gradually dawned upon him that he was very cold, and somehow or other he decided that the steam heat had been cut off; and then it naturally occurred to him that the chill might very easily turn the suffering Mr. Mosenthal's influenza into pneumonia. So having arrived at the decision that it was his duty to remedy this state of things, his sailor's training awoke him with promptness.

He blinked and stared around him. It seemed that he was the victim of a conjuring-trick. He had dozed off, just for a minute, in a wide soft chair upholstered in Persian prayer carpet. He woke up shivering in a bare damp wooden bunk, which was one of a series, which ran round the flanks of a forecastle. He blinked again, and saw that it was the forecastle of a small merchant steamer of British nationality, and some thousand tons burden. His sailor's eye read the indications like large print.

"Gave him knock-out drops in his beer, and stripped him of everything he had, and just shangaïed him on board in the place of one of

his own infernal runners who had done the signing-on. Didn't even send a donkey's breakfast along for the poor devil to sleep on." A big man in shirt sleeves was the speaker, and as the other man called him sir, McTurk deduced that the big one was an officer, and probably mate.

"That red face with all those wrinkles on it was grown at sea, I'll bet a pint. But look at his hands—white and soft as a navy officer's. By Crumbs, it 'ud be a game to have to turn to some howling swell out of the Royal Navy to scrub paint-work."

"United States Navy!" croaked Commander McTurk.

"Oh, you've come to life, have you? And I bet you've a mouth on you like the bottom of a parrot cage. I know the feel. Well, my man, officer or no officer, that doesn't matter. I'm not here to inquire into your shady past. I'm mate of this packet, and you're a deck-hand, and you'll have to turn-to and do your work in that station of life to which it has pleased luck to call you. Now, don't be stupid and put up a fight. I can hammer ten men your length."

Commander McTurk had swung his long legs over the coaming of the bunk and stood on the deck. His clothes were dirty and ragged, his speech was husky, his yellow wig was awry. He did not offer to fight—indeed, put his hands behind his back; but somehow or other he radiated that vague thing called authority, and the mate backed away charily. "You can just turn-to at

chipping paint, and work the dope out of your system."

"I'm going to speak to your captain. Shall I go alone, or do you choose to come with me?"

The big mate scratched his chin meditatively. "I wonder which side out the Old Man is to-day. It's about nine to one he tells me I'm paid to see that the crew work, and then whoops the pair of us on to fight. However, we'll see. Come away aft, Mr. Man."

They went to the chart-house, and there found a small neat officer with a red torpedo beard, who smoked at a black cigar, and employed himself with deft needle and cotton at turning in the frayed edge of a uniform coat. He studiedly ignored their presence for a couple of minutes, and then looked up and snarled, "Want me to do your work Mr. Mate? Weren't the breakfast kidneys done to his lordship's taste this morning?"

"Man says he's a Yankee Naval officer, sir. Of course I'm quite capable of turning him, or twelve like him, on at work if you wish it."

"Try," said Commander McTurk; and the little red-bearded captain measured him up and down with a critical eye. "What rank?" he asked.

"Commander."

"Got your stars tattooed on you anywhere? No, I suppose not. What's your ship?"

"I am on the Retired List."

The little captain sighed. "Had some misfortune? Piled up your boat? Well, I have known enough trouble myself."

"No, I never lost a ship; but on one occasion in the Philippines I exceeded instructions."

"That would give up the same result. I guess your Admiralty Board is very much like our blessed Board of Trade: they are both made up of eighteen-carat blighters, and, by James! I ought to know. Sit down, captain, on that settee, and my steward shall bring you something to wash that taste out of your mouth."

Presently, after McTurk had refreshed himself on a couple of cups of hard-boiled tea, the little red-bearded captain, whose name, it appeared, was Kettle, civilly put at his disposal a bathroom and the miscellaneous clothing in the slop chest, and by the time midday came, the visitor was able to tackle a dinner of high-spiced sea-victual with appetite and gusto.

Thereafter, over cigars in the chart-room, they very nearly came upon disagreement. "I once read," said McTurk, "in a story-book of some chap, who was shangaïed like me, and who was turned on to work in spite of his protests, and who disliked it so much that he fought his way to the top of that ship and made himself her skipper. It made a very nice story, but I bet two dollars and a half it couldn't happen in real life."

"I've heard of it being done."

"Then I'm afraid your informant was not George Washington."

"No, by James, sir, he was not. And I'm not saying a Yankee could do it anyhow. But I do know one low-down Britisher who took a ship that way, and he's here talking to you now."

Captain Kettle's tone was acid, and his visitor's red face flushed to a deep plum-colour. But the accident of one of the next sentences set them on better terms again.

"I gathered from what your mate said that you were bound for Halifax."

"Yes, sir; you can be quit of me there."

"I hope you will understand how much I appreciate the obligation your kindness has laid me under. You like Halifax, perhaps? There was an impressionist sketch in oils I once did of Halifax harbour. It was a sunset effect that struck me as very beautiful. If you would accept the picture, it would give me great pleasure to send it to you."

The little sailor thawed visibly. He reached for a drawer in the chart table, produced from it an exercise book, and turned the pages. "There, Captain," he said, pointing to the manuscript—"there's what I think about Halifax harbour. You see it's entitled 'Lines to the Sunset,' and you'll find it goes to the tune of 'Greenland's Icy Mountains,' which is my favourite air. If you've a musical ear——?"

"I have certainly."

"Then, by James, I'll sing it to you!" said Captain Kettle, and did so very sweetly, to his own accompaniment on the accordion.

That this vinegar-faced little merchant-seaman should reel out line after line of sugary sentiment did not surprise Commander McTurk in the least. He knew the breed. That he should thereafter bring out religious views of a most pronounced type was also what might be expected of him.

But that he should turn out to be mixed up in the McMechie business came with a clap of surprise.

"I have met," said Captain Kettle, "no one of my own religious persuasion—that's the Wharfedale Particular Methodists—amongst shipowners; and I think on the whole it is a good thing, because shipowning seems to carry with it so many temptations that even the elect would find it hard not to fall. But for sheer downright iniquity amongst owners, you can recommend me to a certain Scottish Yankee Jew called McMechie."

"By Glory! and do you know him too?"

"Know the blighter? I should think I did. This old tramp was chartered by his firm across from Catania, in Sicily. We carried sulphur in bulk, and by a verbal arrangement there was a premium on speed. Well, captain, speed means coal, and I had my old chief burn all we could carry. We hustled her through the Mediterranean and across the Western Ocean at an average of ten and a half knots all the way, and nine-point-two's our normal. So there was a big bill for extra bunkers, which the premium would have paid, and still left a nice bit over. Well, when it came to the point there was trouble about the dollars. No one seemed to have heard of the promise. They supposed I must pay for that coal out of my own pocket, if they supposed at all. The one thing they were solid on in that office was that Mr. Abraham Moses McMechie was far too big a bug to talk to any small potatoes of a ship-master: and for three days I stood it. Then,

as I couldn't get my cheque, I said I was going to clean out that office if necessary, but that I was going to see McMechie anyway. I guess I did have to upset five of them, too, before I got to Mr. McMechie's room. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

Commander McTurk polished the end of his long nose with a thoughtful forefinger. "I don't know. It depends on circumstances. You see, I'm not commercially minded."

"I am, sir, all the time. I have to be. I've a wife and family depending on me, and I've them at the back of my mind every minute I'm alive."

"You see," said the American, "I'm rather differently placed. I've my profession to think about. I'm desperately keen on rising in that, and really I don't care for much else outside. What did you do to McMechie?"

"Told him I'd beat him to a jelly if he didn't pay me there and then."

"Well?"

"Oh, I guess he'd heard the scrap outside, and saw I meant business. He paid up right enough, and then he offered me another charter: seemed to think I'd be a good man to employ. But I'd had enough of him. I told him to go on going towards the hot place he'd eventually land in. And the Lord sent me another charter to load wood pulp ten minutes after I'd left his office. Prayer's a great thing, captain, if used in the proper way. I wish you'd let me tell you how the Wharfedale Particular Methodists regard that matter."

Now, so far nothing had been said about the

kidnapping of Mr. McMechie; but that night, as they sat on deck-stools under the lee of the fiddley, Captain Kettle broke off for a minute from playing hymn-tunes to the stars, and, said he, "I wonder what was McMechie's little game? It's not like him to want to cruise in this old tramp just for fun. A big nickel-plated yacht with brass-edged officers and a sham navy crew are far more in his line."

"Do you mean he wanted to charter this steamboat of yours to take a trip in himself?"

"He didn't say it in so many words, but that's the idea I gathered."

Commander McTurk tilted forward his wig over his forehead, and thought hard.—"You know McMechie disappeared directly after you saw him, and the papers say he was kidnapped?"

"No, I read no papers."

"Well, he did. Now, I wonder——"

"If McMechie's kidnapping was personally conducted by Mr. McMechie?"

"Yes. But let's think what he could gain out of it. Supposing he sold stock in his own companies, and then disappeared, the price would go down."

"But would it?"

"We'll suppose that. Then he, or that clever scoundrel Mosenthal, who certainly got me to dose myself, could re-buy the stock at the lower figure."

"Now this is high finance," said Captain Kettle with a certain gusto, and put down the accordion and lit another cigar. "You and I, captain, have just got to talk it out thoroughly." The which they did during the rest of that evening, with

a fine and comprehensive ignorance of their subject.

In due time the British tramp steamer *Cornelian* arrived in Halifax harbour, and Commander McTurk went ashore, and paid much borrowed money into the hands of the telegraph company. Replies trickled in to him slowly; but their import on the whole was satisfactory; and he was just going back on to the *Cornelian* to pay his adieux when another telegram was handed him.

He took it with him, and showed it to his new friend with a laugh of triumph. "How about that, Captain Kettle?"

The small sailor rubbed his hands. "You've got diplomacy, and that's a solid fact, captain. I could no more think out the lies necessary to bring about a scoop like that, than fly. Now, there's just one favour I'm going to ask. I want you to take me with you. I know it isn't business, and being a man with a wife and family, business is the one thing I've got to think about. But the agent here tells me my lading is going to be delayed, and I've stuck the charterers with a fine bill for demurrage already. I've had my mate two years now, and he's competent to tally cargo accurately. The process of learning was painful to him, but he's quite competent now. So I can afford myself a little time to go on a pleasure party. I hate to boast, but up to thirty yards I'm as clean a shot as you'll come across. And in this trip I guess you'll find it handy to have a man along who carries a gun and knows how to use it."

"I'm not fond of shooting," said Commander McTurk doubtfully. "That may be all very well in England, but we're a law-abiding people in the States, and I believe Canada is trying to live up to our standard. But I quite agree that the negotiations may—er—require a little physical force to carry them through, and so, Captain Kettle, I accept your offer with pleasure. I think we both owe so much to Mr. McMechie that we shall not sleep very comfortably till the debt is discharged. And now, if you're coming, I must ask you to hurry. The train leaves the depot in an hour, and we've got to get ashore."

"There's just one thing I want to ask you," said Kettle later, when the train was drawing out for its journey, "and that is, how did you light upon McMechie's tracks?"

"By the simplest means in the world. I wired to a friend of mine to find out if he'd chartered a small steamer later on in the day you had that interview with him, or on one of the two subsequent days. The answer to that was 'yes.' I wired again asking what she was loaded with, and learned that she had gone away in ballast. It was through her skipper's sister we learned where all those refrigerated delicacies were to be sent off to each day."

"So that," commented Kettle, "it is really the man's gluttony that's given him away. If he'd been content with sea food you'd never have found him. Well, gluttony is more disgusting than drunkenness, any day. I preached a sermon on that subject one Sabbath in our chapel at

home that has been very highly spoken of. There was some talk at the time of having it set up in print."

The little bay of islands in which the s.s. *Letty K.* dozed at her anchor was as pretty a place as any man could wish to see; but Mr. Israel McMechie's black and yellow eye had no appreciation for land- or seascape beauty. He was there on the *Letty K.* in furtherance of a big commercial scheme, and the sooner his *coup* was made, and he could return to cities and offices, the sooner he would be pleased. Mr. McMechie felt very lonely when he was out of earshot of the dollar-mill's rumbling.

Things, however, seemed to be nearing the desired climax. His partner and confidential agent in the matter, Mr. Mosenthal, had come out to him that very day with the glad news that success was in sight. They had dined together on the rich food in which their souls delighted, and they sat now on deck with a box of big cigars of the famous *Opulentissimo* brand (fabricated by the McMechie Tobacco Trust) between them.

"I'm very thorry for that Quixotic fool McTurk, Adolph; but he shouldn't interfere in what doth not immediately conthern him. You are sure you shipped him off for a nithe long cruithe?"

"My man guaranteed that he shouldn't set foot on land till he reached China at the very least," said Mosenthal.

"It ith tho annoying," said Mr. McMechie pathetically, "when one's friendth get tangled up

in one's bithneth matterth. But, of course, one can't let friendship stand in the way of bithneth. It ith comforting to remember that as a thailor he will be happy at thea: ithn't that tho, Adolph?"

"What's worrying me," said Mosenthal, with a rather wry smile, "is that he may feel it's his duty to take it out of my hide when he comes back, instead of squaring up the debt with you, on whose account it was really run up.—I say, McMechie, look at that boat pulling out from behind that wooded point. Great Abraham! look at that boat. McTurk's not gone to China, and what's worse, he's found out where we are, and he's coming off to the steamer right now. He's certain to shoot me instead of you."

"You never know your luck," said McMechie philosophically.

"Well, call the crew, man, call the crew, and see that the fellows do not get on board. There are only two of them, and there must be five-and-twenty all told of this steamer's people."

"If they haven't theen uth, they couldn't very well thwear to uth, could they?" said McMechie, and slipped down the companion-way out of sight, where he was very promptly followed by Mosenthal. From the security of the cabin the *Letty K.'s* charterer gave stringent orders that all intruders were to be kept off, even to the shedding of blood, and then they sat themselves down to wait.

Out of a small round port they could see the boat rowed up with long regular strokes, the

oars feathered accurately and in perfect time, as though each rower were trying to show his best form to the other. Then they lost sight of her as she rounded up underneath the *Letty K.'s* flank, and presently they heard for themselves the uproar which broke forth as she swept up alongside the companion ladder.

But this uproar, instead of quickly abating (as it should have done when twenty-five men set upon two), increased steadily in virulence; it mounted rapidly upwards; and in a comparatively small measure of seconds the battle stamped vigorously to and fro on the deck above their very heads. There was no shooting. There were blows and cries—especially cries; and Mosenthal, who was a nervous man, came very near to fainting with apprehension. Then either one side beat the other, or a truce was called, they could not tell which; and next moment, lo! there was a tall, red-faced Commander J. K. McTurk stooping in through the cabin door, with a small man who wore a spruce torpedo beard stepping smartly along at his heels. McTurk's knuckles were bleeding.

The interview which followed had its painful side, but there was no suggestion of violence; nor, to Mr. Mosenthal's bewildered amazement, was any reference made to those tricky white tabloids in the Sèvres jar which were not saccharine. Instead, Commander McTurk seemed to lay stress on the financial ruin which would follow upon the discovery of Mr. McMechie's ruse.

"Now own up," said Commander McTurk,

"that Wall Street would be just too hot to hold you if they found out that you had kidnapped yourself just to rob them."

"It thertainly ith open to thome thlight mithconstruction."

"And they'll know as sure as Heaven made little apples if you stay here another six hours. You'll have the Press down here by the next train, and after them the deluge. Now you know quite well the New York Press will give you no mercy, McMechie."

"I mutht thay they have been very hothtile of late."

"There you are, then. Now here am I coming in to pick you out of the mud, as usual. (Oh, beg pardon, may I introduce Captain Kettle?) You must clear out of here at once. I suppose the *Letty K.* is not bunkered for a run across to Europe? No, I thought not. You'd be nowhere, McMechie, if you hadn't me to look after you. Well, I've arranged with Captain Kettle here to run you over to Cardiff, and you can lie low in some English village till things blow over a bit."

"You'll need to recruit after a run across the Western Ocean with me," said Kettle.

Commander McTurk frowned at him. "I don't think Captain Kettle need apologise for the fare he will offer you."

"You'll get your Board of Trade whack," said the little man with the red beard.

"Well, the *Cornelian* is lying in Halifax Harbour, and if you'll call down your skipper and give him orders, the sooner he heaves his anchor

out of the United States the safer for both your skins and your purses."

"Half a minute," said Kettle. "Now, you quite understand that I carry no passenger certificate?"

"Yes, yes, my good man."

"Don't call me your good man. So if you want to come with me you'll have to sign on ship's articles in the regular way."

"Yes, yes," said McMechie impatiently, and himself ran out on deck to give orders for immediate sailing.

"Well, if you quite understand the situation," said Captain Kettle, acidly, "don't you dare to come grumbling to me afterwards."

* * * * *

The British s.s. *Cornelian*, 1,000-ton 10-knot tramp, lay hove-short in Halifax Harbour, with steam oozing from her escape valves. To her gangway came a boat carrying four persons, who presently emerged on to the deck above.

"Well, captain," said Mr. McMechie, "here we are at last, and if you'll show Mr. Mosenthal and me our rooms, we'd like to get settled into them before we start."

"Certainly," said Kettle, and called for the mate. "Mr. Mate," said he to that big person, "you complained that you were a bit short-handed. Well, here are two new deck-hands for you. They've just signed on."

"What does this mean?" spluttered McMechie.

"Say 'sir' when you speak to an officer, or you'll be knocked down. Take them forward,

Mr. Mate, give them bunks, and then turn them to at chipping paint. I think you'll need to sweat a deal of tallow off both of them before they're worth their salt, but you should make sailors of them before they reach the other side of the Western ocean."

"That's what I'm here for, sir," said the big mate cheerfully. "Now then, Sheenies, get a move on you, or I'll lift you from here to the fo'c'sl doors in one kick."

"McTurk!" cried Mr. McMechie, "this is an outrage!"

The big mate sent him flying. "Say 'sir' when you speak to an officer. Don't answer me back. Get to your fo'c'sl, you hound, or by crumbs! I'll kick you there."

"Well, captain," said Kettle, turning to his other guest, "here we part, I suppose; and I must say I'm very pleased to have made your acquaintance. You've got a knack of diplomacy about you that I admire."

The thousand tiny wrinkles that seamed Commander McTurk's red face deepened to his smile. "I take it I've squared up to a nicety, and I do think I've managed my piece of kidnapping most legally. They signed on your ship's articles of their own free will and accord, and they'll have to work as deck-hands and submit to proper discipline, whether they like it or not. They're soft as butter, both of them, and they come of a race that never made sailors. Don't kill them, Captain Kettle, on the road across."

"Trust me, sir. I'll just sweat the tallow and vice out of them."

"Good-bye, captain. I've been speculating all this time as to whether you'd recollect seeing me once before in the Western Ocean, but I see you don't. I wonder where we shall meet next."

"And now," said Commander McTurk to himself as he went down to his boat, "I shall have a devil of a time of it explaining all this to Bridget."

Chapter XII

THE GLORIOUS RESTORATION

It has been unkindly said that in the present year of grace the foreign population of the city of Las Palmas in Grand Canary is mostly made up of Liverpool shopkeepers. By the enterprise of a great shipping firm one can get first-class steamer fare to and from the island, with a fortnight's pension at a hotel, all for the ridiculously small sum of £15, and naturally the number of people who snap at so generous an offer is large. But there are others who come for golf, and others again who are driven there by sore lungs. Mariners bring in big passenger boats and freight boats to coal, and all these add to the cosmopolitan crowds ashore. And of course a tremendous lot of people are interested in the banana, banking, tomato, coaling, tramway, early potato, and other businesses that flourish in the island.

In fact, like Suez or Charing Cross, Las Palmas is a grand place to meet people in; and so when I came across Commander J. K. McTurk in that square just opposite the cathedral, although I imagined him to be still pestering the Navy Office in Washington, all the same I wasn't very much surprised to see him. One gets

out of being surprised at meetings in Grand Canary.

He had a lady with him, so I raised my hat. I almost laughed when I saw it was Mrs. Codrington. She did not cut me. She gave me an inch-and-three-quarters bow, and dropped her parasol. As McTurk picked it up he caught my eye. She had passed by that time, so I winked at him pleasantly. However, he scowled at me and drew himself up to the height of about six feet six, to show he resented the familiarity, and so I came to the conclusion that we should have to put off our usual talk till once more chance brought us into contact.

As it turned out, they'd landed that morning from the South Africa boat, and were both staying at the Catalina, with a duenna of sorts to play propriety. I was rather pleased when I saw Mrs. Codrington looking through the hotel register that afternoon. She could read for herself there that I had been in the place for a week. Mrs. Codrington always imagines that all the men are running after her, and it is as well to have a clean bill of health in this matter to start with.

I laughed sedately at McTurk during the next two days whenever my eye caught his, and for a bit he scowled at me. Then he gave it up, and laughed too. He's always flirting with some woman or other—he really can't help it; but to find him back again on the trail of Mrs. Codrington, after all that had happened, was really too funny. It took him, as I say, two days to see where the humour of the thing came in from my

point of view; and at the end of that time he and she and the duenna carried themselves off. I met them driving down to the harbour in a tartana, and later happened to see them on board the little interinsular boat as she steamed out and headed for the eastern group. That afternoon a man told me Mrs. Codrington had bought Graviola Island.

"Where's that?" I asked.

"Off Lanzarote. Steep place, chiefly made up of cinders and an out-of-work volcano. It also suffers from sandstorms when the Sahara is feeling ruffled."

"What's she want it for? To breed those black hawk-shaped seagulls on?"

"Merely because she got it cheap: regular woman's reason. Says she'll build a feudal castle there to spend winters in."

"And has she taken J. K. McTurk along because he's a crank on birds-eggs? He knows nothing about the architecture of feudal castles, anyway."

"Give it up. Toss you for cocktails; and then we'll go and dress for dinner."

Now it struck me that Mrs. Codrington was not the woman to waste even a little of her large store of money over a thing just because it was cheap, and not because she wanted it; but really I was thankful enough that she had gone out of my neighbourhood; and by the time we had finished the gin cocktails (which had too much lime in them, by the way) I had let Mrs. Lucy Codrington and her amusing past slip gently from my memory.

For myself I went off to South Morocco for

some moufflon shooting the next day, and rather dropped out of Canary affairs; but when I got back to Las Palmas, there was the *Reina Clotilda*, a big new Spanish cruiser, and a flotilla of torpedo-boats in the harbour, and they told me in the boat going ashore that the demonstration was all in honour of Commander J. K. McTurk. The tartana drivers hooted me as we bumped in over the tram-lines from the port to the hotel, because they thought I was an American; and the manager there told me that a warship was expected over from the States."

"But what on earth for?"

"To protect American interests. That's all we know. The authorities here are sitting very tight on the end of the cables. They censor all political news. There's a British cruiser squadron floating about somewhere in this part of the Western Ocean; and if there's trouble, I suppose that'll turn up and join in the fun, or else umpire. It's just the thick of the banana season, too, and business has simply gone to pieces. The Englishmen here are pretty hard hit over it, and naturally they are furious. If Captain McTurk turned up in Las Palmas just now, and the Spaniards started in to lynch him, I guess all the other nationalities would bear a hand. They regard him as head nuisance."

"But what," I repeated, "is it all about?"

"Don't know," said the manager, "in the very least. We shan't know either till his excellency the censor sees fit to withdraw the veil."

And so in the dark we remained. The facts, when they did leak out, arrived out of

chronological order, but for purposes of clearness they may be rearranged here.

McTurk with the two ladies landed at Arrecife in Lanzerote in the ordinary way; put in a couple of very crude days at the fonda there; and then took camel and went across the shifting dunes to the other side of the island. A heavy baggage-train lurched and sprawled behind them, and when it had been ferried across to Graviola, this developed into tents, camp furniture, and a battery of cooking tools. It seemed that the duenna had a taste for neatness and the washing of dishes, in which she was allowed to indulge herself to the full; Commander McTurk cooked, and Mrs. Codrington inspected their labours from the depths of a Madeira chair.

"Nobody seems inclined to disturb us," said Mrs. Codrington. "I'm afraid you were trying to alarm me unnecessarily, J. K."

"I purposely made many inquiries after birds' eggs and nests in Arrecife," said Commander McTurk, "and also in San Miguel de Teguise, and that earned us a good comfortable reputation for insanity. Then I hinted that you had bought Graviola for the sake of that out-of-date volcano up there."

"What's the harm in that?"

"Oh, they jumped to the conclusion that you were going to put it in working order again—I insisted on it you were an American, you know—just for the amusement of having cheap firework displays after dinner at nights. From that they naturally deduced that you are in league with the devil, and as one immediate result, I'll ask you to

remember all the difficulty we had in getting those mangy camels for the transport."

"You're right about that. When I tried with the camel-man myself, he dabbed a cross on his waistcoat, and turned away and shuddered."

"I never have," laughed Commander McTurk with genial malice, "seen my dear Lucy's *beaux yeux* at such a discount before."

Mrs. Codrington wagged an expressive finger. "I am not your Lucy yet, by any means."

"Oh, but I hold you ruthlessly to your promise."

"And I never shall be your Lucy if you set me up as the Scarlet Woman, or the Spirit of the Volcano, or whatever it was, for the annoyance of these grubby islanders. When I remember how that man who said he grew the best white wine in Lanzerote deliberately stepped back so that my shadow shouldn't fall upon him, why, it just makes me feel hot all over. You must please carry it in mind, J. K., that I like to be popular always, even though it rather clashes with success."

"That's where we differ, my dear. I want success first of all; and as for popularity, I only want that with the Navy Board at Washington, and with you."

Mrs. Codrington closed her parasol with a snap, and stood up. "That's candid anyway: your profession first, and me next. You've never put it quite so baldly as that before, Captain McTurk."

"If there had been no Navy," said McTurk quietly, "and no United States, you and I would have been married long before this, Lucy. By

Glory!—I beg your pardon for the interruption, but look there!"

"The steamer! well, we shall have decent cooking, and a house to live in at any rate, now."

Commander McTurk ignored the gibe at his culinary skill, and with a curt "Excuse me," strode off to a rock that overlooked the anchorage as fast as his long legs would carry him.

Mrs. Codrington looked after him contemplatively. "You dear!" she said. "The States shall have their new toy just because it will please you so to give it to them. And afterwards—well, I really will let you make me Mrs. J. K. this time."

The steamer, which worked her way in with much cautious help from the lead, was an ordinary bull-nosed collier of some five thousand tons, and, as a point of fact, had brought much of her cargo straight across from the coal-drops in Norfolk, Virginia. She was commanded by one Stubbs, a cheerful profane person of German extraction; and when she brought up to her anchor, and had dropped boats from her davits, and hoisted and swung out derricks, she proceeded with all speed to break out a cargo which seemed to consist largely of cement bags, wooden cases, and American workmen. And at that point a very ugly piece of international trouble may be said to have commenced.

At first sight it would seem that no law was broken here. Mrs. Codrington (as she stated) had bought the isle of Graviola for the purpose of building a house upon it: cement and the local sand would make the best of concrete; and if her ideas of the æsthetic in architecture ran to

concrete, that was not the affair of a Ministry in Madrid.

But if one inspects the large scale chart of the Canary group, it will appear that where Graviola faces its parent island of Lanzerote, the coast is cupped in horse-shoe shape; and it leaps to the mind at once that here is a harbour of the finest. The heights of Graviola obviously dominate all approaches to the anchorage; and to the jealous eye, cement bags, volcanic ash, and sand, can (with the aforesaid American workmen as confederates) be very quickly conjured into concrete gun emplacements, with bombardment-proof shelters. Furthermore, wooden cases may contain infinite possibilities in the way of mines, guns, shells.... So it may be readily understood how (at the Madrid end of the cable) the whole thing spelled in very unmistakable words 'Fortified United States Coaling Station.'

As a point of accurate fact it was this, neither more nor less, that Commander McTurk had in mind. His country possessed no coaling station in either of the Eastern Atlantics; the need for one from the Navy point of view was clamorous; and McTurk proposed by a *coup de main* to supply the need. The title to the isle, as purchased by Mrs. Codrington, was sound enough; and although the use to which it was to be put was illegal from an international point of view, Commander McTurk trusted that the United States would hold on to what was good for them when once the presentation had been made. Once a coaling station was in full swing, it would be difficult for the most timorous politician to delete it.

The way that the alarm was spread could hardly have been calculated upon. A preliminary survey of the isle had shown it to be tenantless. The few euphorbia bushes which the sand and the volcanic scoriæ supported gave it very little value to the Canary farmer's eye. As Commander McTurk gathered the eggs of the gulls for his collection, he quite understood why the birds had the place to themselves, and did not wonder at their tameness. But one morning there arrived from the outer spaces of the blue-and-white Atlantic, running close-reefed before a vigorous Trade, a green-painted schooner, which dropped her hook in the harbour, and emitted the smell of fish. Presently, when she got her boat overside, and began to ferry cargo ashore, the smell of fish grew stronger; and a little later, when her people began to set up drying-screens for the manufacture of baccalhao, the smell almost swept the beach clear of the intruders.

"I expect it's nothing when you're used to it," coughed Commander McTurk.

"If you can't turn the Trade wind and make it blow the other way," said Mrs. Codrington, "I shall pack up my bonnet-box and go home. As an alternative, please go down and tell the creatures to quit."

Commander McTurk rubbed the end of his long nose with a doubtful forefinger. "I'm afraid it would be advisable to regard them as an encumbrance upon the estate. Ancient vested interests, you know. I expect it'll turn out they've been spreading smells over these cinders 'way back since the year one."

"John Kelly," said Mrs. Codrington faintly, "am I the only woman that you adore, or am I not?"

"Oh, if you make such a point of it," said McTurk resignedly, "I'll do my best."

The green schooner, as it turned out, was not of the islands, nor was she even Spanish. She was (as Captain Jão Horas volubly explained) Portuguese, and from Madeira; and her people had as big a dislike and contempt for these lazy Spanish dagoes as any Yankee could have.

Commander McTurk forbore to point out that the men of Portugal in sea classification also come under the heading of dago, and again civilly stated that the isle had changed hands, and that objectionable trades must be discontinued.

Captain Jão Horas rolled a cigarette, and invited his tall caller to be seated on a fish-box beside him. "Now you," he pointed out, "are building a fort. You are also, I feela sure, laying mines in the fair-a-way. I once served my time in the Portuguese Navy, so I know. I am what you call expert-a. Those Spaniards in Las Palmas would fill my hat-a with pesetas for the news. But do I carry it? No, señhor: I care no more for the good of Spaniards than I care for the welfare of the Germans or the beastly English. I stay here in Graviola and attend to my own business affair-a. You savvy?"

"You're a sound man. What's that cargo of violets worth?"

Captain Jão Horas scratched amongst a week's beard and calculated. Then he threw away his cigarette, stood up, folded his arms, and made

reply: I do not speak in milreis, because-a the sum would look too large. But in United States money, for $1,000 paid-a quarterly I will make no more baccalhao on Graviola whilst payment lasts. But you must give me five years in advance-a."

"Those your lowest terms?"

"A Portuguese gentleman never haggles."

"First time I've heard that. Come, my man, I'll give you exactly $100 spot cash to pack up and quit. Now, there are plenty of other islands hereaway. Go and poison one of them."

"I must have my full terms."

"You savvy the hot place?"

"It has been described to me."

"Then you make a trip down and get your terms there. This island belongs to Mrs. Codrington by purchase, and you've got to go. If you don't pull down your stink fences within the next two hours I'll have you and them thrown into the sea. Take your hand off that knife. Just go and do as you are bid. Now mark, if you pull that knife on me, I'll break your wrist in two places."

Captain Jão Horas delivered in fluent Portuguese an opinion of Commander McTurk which that officer did not understand, and took himself off; and presently, when the green-painted schooner was reloaded, she weighed, and got under canvas.

"I much doubt," Commander McTurk told himself as he watched her dance out over the white and turquoise sea, "I much doubt whether he'll get so much as a single peseta for his news, but I bet two dollars and a half he tries to collect

it. By Glory! what a dish of colour there is round that schooner! I'd give a lot if I'd time to get it down on canvas."

Now, it has been said that the Spanish Government were spurred into activity in this matter of Graviola by the English coaling companies of Las Palmas and Teneriffe; but I do not think this likely. As a commercial proposition, any Graviola coaling company is practically out of the question, for a variety of reasons.

But it was plain, even to the lay eye, that the place would have a tremendous military value to the United States. Of course it would not be openly fortified, but short of mounting guns and laying mines, everything could be got ready under the cloak of commerce; and once a war broke out, an escorted steamer could be rushed into the harbour, and the isle could spring into being as a fortress almost instantly. No wonder the mirrors winked in the darkened cable-rooms.

A stream of callers began to pour into the harbour, and the first, characteristically enough, was H.B.M. very ancient barque-rigged steam corvette *Panther*. She had cast up apparently out of nowhere, and a boat-load of her officers in mufti came ashore to stretch their legs. They were extremely delighted to find a lady and luncheon on an isle reported desolate in the Atlantic Directory, and annoyed to learn that there was no quail-shooting. They were very incurious about what was going on in Graviola, and pleasantly communicative about the *Panther's* past cruise. They were gentlemen, all of them, and their presence was a tonic; but when they

had gone, Commander McTurk told himself rather quizzically that for all their incuriosity, they had left knowing as much about the new works on Graviola as he did, and as for their charming talkativeness about where they had been—well, any one could have learned just as much solid information from a guide-book. Being a Navy man himself, he appreciated the cleverness of this to the full.

Before the *Panther* was hull-down, the green-painted schooner reappeared from round a point of Lanzerote and commenced beating up against the heavy Trade. It was evening before she made the harbour, and the glass showed upon her decks three men in the attitudes of sea-sickness. Two of these were in uniform: none of them had been amongst the former members of the green schooner's crew.

"Just like a Portuguese," said Commander McTurk to Mrs. Codrington. "I bet two dollars and a half Jão Horas would rather put in a piece of unnecessary revenge any day than carry on his usual affairs. He's not wasted much time in bringing the might of Spain down about our ears."

"I must say I rather sympathise with him," said the lady inconsistently; "but we couldn't go on letting him make that abominable smell with his fish, could we? And I rely on you to see he doesn't begin again."

"Certainly, my dear Lucy.—Captain Stubbs!"

"Sir?" said that officer.

"See that schooner's people do not land."

"With pleasure, sir. Shall I shoot them down

where they are, on deck, or wait till some of them put off in that boat?"

"We are not pirates," rasped McTurk angrily. "You are to hurt no one. Just keep them off."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Stubbs, and winked agreeably to himself as he went away. "His Nibs is not wound up to concert pitch yet," he commented. "But I bet his favourite two dollars and a half that we have him hoisting Old Glory and saying, 'Give me liberty and a free run for the Great United States, or give me death,' before we're through this racket. He's a great patriot, is Wiggy McTurk. They ought to take him back into the Navy and keep him safe, or he'll run the United States into a war yet, before he's through with trying to benefit them." After which soliloquy he gave orders to a knot of men, who bombarded Captain Jão Horas' boat with lumps of volcanic scoriæ whenever it came within range.

The green-painted schooner sailed away into an elaborate sunset that evening, gesticulating threats; and sure enough she returned three days later crammed with soldiery. But the instructions of even these were unsatisfactory. They had got no direct command through from Madrid. They were ordered to "take peaceful possession of Graviola," but as the accursed Americans refused to render them peaceful possession, what was to be done?

They landed in the teeth of a hot fusillade of cinders, and found themselves facing a concrete wall eighteen feet high, which was topped by a lot of ugly looking men who carried revolvers, and seemed anxious to use them.

The Spanish officer in command asked for the officer in command of the other side. Commander McTurk leaned his elbows on the wall and looked down. "I think I answer most nearly to that description, señor. But you mustn't call me an officer. I'm merely here acting as agent of Mrs. Codrington, who has bought this island. These men you see here are her employees. May I point out that you are trespassing on private property? I should be obliged if you would remove yourself and your friends with the smallest possible delay."

The Spanish officer spluttered. "My orders are to take possession of the island. I demand that that door be opened at once."

"Can't be done."

"Then I shall have to employ force."

"As to the advisability of that, you must be your own judge. Of course anything you do in that line would be hopelessly illegal, and your superiors would leave you to bear the consequences."

This was a guess on McTurk's part, but it hit a thin spot. The Spanish officer was a middle-aged man with a comfortable figure. He had no great wish for promotion: he had a profound distaste for responsibility. He eyed the tough-looking crowd who lined the top of that white wall and took their measure correctly. They were fairly itching for a fight. Once he gave the word to fire a shot, a bloody battle would be lit at a moment's notice. Somebody would have to bear the blame. These infernal gringos were mere irresponsibles: the alcalde of Arrecife had said it. All the onus would be piled on his own shoulders.

He by no means proposed that this should be so.

If the invaders would not surrender, they must do the other thing. The elderly officer said this with much elaboration, and by degrees drew off his men, reboarded Captain Jão Horas' green-painted schooner, and sailed away out of this history. That afternoon a gang of men worked on a slab-sided flank of the old volcano, and by eventide a legend glared out in letters of whitewash fifteen feet high that the Graviola Coaling Company supplied Virginia coal and best Welsh, F. O. B., on reasonable terms. The black hawk-tailed gulls alone were moved to comment over it. That part of the Western Ocean is singularly devoid of steamer traffic.

It was again the green-painted schooner which brought Mr. Elihu Budd on to the scene; which showed that although Captain Jão Horas could be a good hater, the leverage of the dollar could make him put in occasional interludes of bringing succour to the enemy.

"I reckon," said Mr. Budd, "that the correct packet fare to this slag dump of yours is about five dollars. But that hairy son of Belial said his price was five hundred, and as there was no competition I had to close."

"Must have been anxious to call," said the tall sailor. "Got something to say that couldn't wait till next mail?"

"You can bet your sweet life on that. Say, d'you know that they've got scare headlines about you a foot high in the N'York papers? The *World* had it 'J. K. on the Warpath Again.' The *Times* said 'Mrs. Codrington frou-frous the Way to Empire.' Say, whose idea was it?"

"Come in out of the sunshine, Mr. Budd, and when we're alone perhaps you'll have something official you'd like to say to me."

"Oh I'm not in politics any just now," said Budd hastily, "so you must only look to me for friendly opinions and so on.—Ah, here's the lady. How do you do?—Well, Mrs. Codrington, if your object was to set all the United States and half Europe talking about one woman, you've done it. My! but you should see the photographs of you they're publishing. Hair not done a bit like that, and clothes of a fashion of two years ago. And the biographies of the 'Greatest Lady Financier!' I've got the *Post* and the *Mail* in my grip. I guess you'll scream when you read them."

"You're a very nice person," said Mrs. Codrington, "but you didn't come here to tell me that."

"No; I was there at an hotel in Las Palmas having a vacation——"

"And being unofficial for the moment," suggested McTurk, "somebody in authority in the States thought that you'd be just the man to carry a message that couldn't very well be given to an official personage."

Mr. Budd laughed. "You're a great man, J. K., but you're a bit too go-ahead for a slow old country like the United States. You musn't take anything I say too seriously—as I keep on telling you I'm out of politics now. I'm taking a vacation, and if the cooking would let me, I'd be putting on weight. But even in easy, lazy times like these I'm always open to a bit of speculation. Come now, what's the latest

quotation on the Graviola Bourse for this coal stock of yours?"

"What's the quotation in Las Palmas?" asked Mrs. Codrington.

"There isn't one. There are no buyers, and they haven't thought it worth while to make a price. Market's equally dull in Madrid."

"Well I think there's a sound future to the business," said the lady, "under proper management of course, and I shan't let go any of my stock below a fair price."

"I wasn't asking you to," said Budd. "But I'd be very pleased to take up a tidy block at a shade under par."

Commander McTurk and Mrs. Codrington almost leaped out of their seats. They knew this man.

"It'll go through, then?" asked the sailor.

Mr. Elihu Budd put up two fat hands. "Now you're asking me about politics again, and I keep on telling you I'm not in 'em. And furthermore I'd like to call your memories to that profound historical remark that the Governor of North Carolina made to the Governor of South Carolina. If we can get that hirsute image of sin on the schooner to break out cargo, you'll find I've brought you some fresh lines. It was the swizzle-stick on the sideboard there that reminded me of them. When I'm on official business, of course I don't drink; but when I'm having a vacation, and there's a heat like this, I guess I could sell the eternal welfare of the Canary Islands for something long and cool with just a bit of bite in it."

"By Glory!" cried Commander McTurk, "I'll invent a Graviola Cooler in honour of the occasion."

His Spanish Majesty's ship *Reina Clotilda* steamed untidily into harbour the next morning, already cleared for action, and bristled out enough big guns to have blown half the old volcano into the water. Outside, H.B.M.S. *Panther*, which had turned up again out of nowhere, lay sprucely hove-to under sail, and sawed over the swells inside easy telescope range.

"This," said Mrs. Codrington, as she put down her morning coffee-cup, "is a naval demonstration."

"They may demonstrate till they are black in the face as far as I am concerned," said Commander McTurk. "After the hints Budd let drop last night, I'm going to hold on here with claws, toes, guns, and eyelashes. I've had the men dig a place for you, Lucy, where you'll be safe if those fellows start in to shell us."

"Poof! Me down in a grubby cyclone cellar? Why, aren't we partners, J. K.?"

"Not full partners. I wish we were. You've half promised so many times."

"I'll marry you, you old dear, when the time comes. Bring off this coup, and then we will call it a deal."

"Then," said Commander McTurk, "by Glory! it shall be pulled off, if I have to hang on here, one man alone, with all the Spanish Navy battering at me. After that definite promise, I'm going to have you for my wife, Lucy, if I have to set fire to half Europe to get you. But, you know,

the people at Washington will repudiate us. Budd said so."

"They'll repudiate us if we're thrown out. But if we hold on for long enough, we are bound to have our interests protected."

"Ah," said McTurk thoughtfully, "'interests protected.' That's a good phrase. I'll remember it. Well, good-bye, dear. I must go out now and pow-wow with the insulted might of Spain."

Now, the captain of the *Reina Clotilda* was detailed off for this job of clearing the Yankees out of Graviola, because he was notoriously "a man who would stand no nonsense." He sent a note ashore which read as follows:—

"*Commander J. K. McTurk, U.S.N.*

"*Sir,—If you and your men do not evacuate the island of Graviola within six hours, I shall open a bombardment.*

"*I have the honour to be, sir,*

"*Your obedient servant,*

"*J. de Tolera (Captain).*"

To which McTurk made reply:—

"*To Captain J. de Tolera, H.S.M.N.*

"*Sir,—Bombard and be d——d to you.*

"*I am, sir,*

"*Your obedient servant,*

"*J. K. McTurk (formerly Commander U.S.N.).*"

"It is a pity," said the lieutenant who brought the cartel, "that the thing can't be arranged. I'm

speaking unofficially, of course, but it seems an awful waste for you chaps to stand up before our guns. You haven't a chance. You can't hit back, and it would be piracy for that matter if you did, and you'll only be slaughtered uselessly."

"No, sir," said Commander McTurk in his best manner, "I take it that we're defending a principle. Mrs. Codrington bought this island in open market; she sees a chance of setting up a perfectly legitimate business in the coaling line; and the Spanish Government comes along with brutal force to try and ruin her. I quite admit that the United States aren't backing us at present; but you open your bombardment, and kill a few United States citizens, and you'll have a war crowding down on you before you can think."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders. "I'm afraid that won't weigh much with Captain Tolera."

Commander McTurk sighed. "I must wish you good-bye. I've work to do. I'm real sorry for Captain Tolera. He's a man who's going to do what he thinks best for his country; and I guess when the trouble begins, later on, some one big will discover that Captain Tolera has exceeded instructions, and he'll be made scapegoat. I've been in that box myself once in the Philippines. And don't you make any error about the fact that trouble will follow. You see that mast, with Old Glory blowing out in those fine rich folds at the top of it? Well, sir, that flag looks pretty innocent, and I daresay from your point of view the United States look to have just about as much snap in them just now

as you'd find in a can of putty. But you shoot down that flag, sir, and you'll see hell opened. I wish you a good afternoon."

Punctually at the end of six hours' time, and without further preliminary warning, Captain Tolera opened his bombardment. The Stars and Stripes blew out stiffly in the Trade above the white buildings. This was the gunners' mark, and uncommonly bad practice they made of it.

The flimsy dwelling-houses were blown inside out. The concrete works were scored and scarred by high explosive shell, but were practically undamaged; though, as the fire was very inaccurate, the desolate cinder-heaps of the volcano and the rare euphorbia bushes caught most of the missiles, and their contours were changed in all directions. Yellow clouds billowed up to the turquoise sky; a yellow stain defiled all the landscape that lay near the focus of the bombardment.

Amid that whistling storm of metal splinters, and in that awful cloud of poisonous gas, it seemed impossible that men could live, especially men who were not warmed up by the counter-excitement of returning the fire. But there was no suggestion of parley or surrender. The Stars and Stripes blew out stiffly from its mast, and the men whose emblem it was took their pelting in grim silence. The captain of the *Reina Clotilda* had counted on an exchange of shots and the thrill of victory. Instead he felt that he was witnessing a massacre, and, being a man of high spirit, was drenched in a cold sweat as he named himself a common executioner.

Now, Commander John Kelly McTurk, as has

been shown many times in these memoirs, could exhibit a brazen courage when the need came; but better than this, he was an officer of fine discernment. Moreover, if the occasion had demanded it, he would have risked the lives of his men, who occupied the works, without a qualm. But, as it happened, a casemate was at his disposal which no high explosive shell could damage, and he availed himself of this before a shot was fired.

In the old days, before Europeans occupied the Canaries, the Guanches, who then held them, were cave dwellers. They had lived, it seemed, on Graviola (presumably on a frugal diet of cinders and fish), but, anyway, there they were, as their remains show. The Canary Spaniard of to-day is an incurious creature, and the Guanche burrows on Graviola were for the most part drifted up and hidden. But when the American workmen were shovelling out sand for concrete at the back of their works, they unearthed by accident the entrance to a great system of galleries which bored deep through the lava to the opposite face of the cliffs; and as soon as Captain Tolera's six hours had expired, Commander McTurk withdrew all his force deep into these musty caverns.

Mrs. Codrington sat in the edge of an opening, and threw small scraps of lava into the surf that creamed two hundred feet below her. From overhead and behind came the yell and roar of the bombardment, dulled by rock and the distance.

"Did you see those mummies wrapped up in goatskins in that side cave we passed, J. K.?

Funny housekeepers these old Guanches must have been, to have had a cemetery tacked on to their house, just as we would have a jam cupboard."

"Very probably," said Commander McTurk, straining his ears to find out the size and number of the guns that were in action. "Now I've brought you here, Lucy, as you wished, though I am sure Budd would have made just as efficient an escort. And now I must ask you to excuse me. I've got to get back and see what's going on. I'm sure, if you call, Budd will get anything you want."

"He'd get me a wedding ring," said Mrs. Codrington provokingly, "if I fluttered so much as an eyelash in his direction."

This was too near the truth to be palatable to the tall sailor. But he was equal to the emergency. "Then if that's the case," he snapped, "I'll take Budd back with me, and keep him safe under fire. If you want anything, call Stubbs. I don't believe even you will flirt with Stubbs.

Mrs. Codrington watched his retreating form with a moist eye. "You sweetheart!" she murmured to herself. "I only said that to try and keep you here and safe. But you just can't hold your dear fingers out if there's a bit of danger anywhere."

Now, Captain Tolera's martial ardour evaporated considerably as the one-sided bombardment went on. He had set out to be a hero: it struck him that presently he would qualify as a poltroon. So when the *Panther* worked into anchorage under sail, he leaped at the chance of mediation.

The *Panther* was very spruce, very obsolete, and magnificently handled. She had steam; and to work her into harbour under sail was a piece of gratuitous nautical swagger. The *Reina Clotilda* was a ship of the current year's class, full of all the latest machinery for scientific slaughter; the *Panther's* fighting value was nil; but the Britisher calmly blew in between the Spaniard and his prey, furled sails in a way that would have pleased even Nelson, and sent her boatswain ahead in the jolly-boat to square yards to the last miracle of an angle. Then the side was piped, and her captain in the fullest of naval full-dress paid a visit of state to Captain Tolera in the *Reina Clotilda.* Commander McTurk, who always was a spruce and even a dandified man himself, swore as he watched him. The United States Naval full-dress has a decent puritanical plainness. Nothing like (thought Commander McTurk) that peacocky turn-out.

The bombardment had necessarily ceased when the *Panther* interposed her ancient self between the guns and the target, and what transpired at the subsequent conference Commander McTurk could not tell. It is probable that Mr. Elihu Budd was able to make a pretty accurate guess at the future trend of events, if one might judge from the way that he freely exposed himself amongst the concrete ruins that were still scorching hot from the impact of the shells. But there for the time being proceedings ceased. The threatened landing, which McTurk was prepared to resist to the last extremity, never came off. A boat brought ashore a message from Captain Tolera, saying that

at the friendly request of the captain of the *Panther* he had agreed to suspend further hostilities pending reference of the matter to the cabinets in Washington and Madrid. And Commander McTurk, who was very much inclined to send an uppish reply, was restrained into the language of civility by Mr. Elihu Budd.

"Now's the time," said Commander McTurk, "to cable Washington fully." He hit the flag-pole, from which the Stars and Stripes still blew out into the Trade, a tribute to the bad gunnery of the Spaniards. "I want to tell them we've kept Old Glory flying in fact as well as in theory. After what we've done, this Graviola coaling-station is a practical cinch for the States if they'll only take five cents' worth of trouble. By Glory! Think of Britain with a chance like this. How they'd snap at it! Why, they'd make Lucy a peeress in her own right for what she's done."

"And you an Admiral? Well, I don't know They're a rum lot in Great Britain, J. K., rummer even than we are in the States. If they catch a citizen trying to add an acre on to the Empire, they generally prosecute him for piracy or something like that. But they never thank him. The anti-patriotic party's always strong enough to see to that. No, don't you run away with the idea that because the skunk's an American animal we've got a monopoly in skunks. But as for cabling, why, there you may save your hard-earned wages. The cabling's been done. You've set half the citizens of the United States gazing with feelings of tumultuous pride at the Star-spangled Banner already."

Now, there is no doubt that the settlement, when it did come, was a bad shock to Commander McTurk's feelings. Of course the coaling-station on Graviola (which could so quickly have been fortified) would never have been permitted by Spain, not to mention that all the other European powers would have been equally hostile to it. But it is better to compromise than to fight, and it was beyond question that Mrs. Codrington had bought the island and had established certain rights there.

So that astute lady-financier received a very large sum of money indeed to buy out her rights; the United States and Spain squared the political part of the deal by merging it with another political deal they had in Costa Rica; the captain of the *Panther* was promoted; the unfortunate Captain Tolera was removed from his command in the *Reina Clotilda* because (as McTurk predicted) some one discovered that he had exceeded instructions; and the unofficial Mr. Elihu Budd ended his vacation with some suddenness, and became something official without further delay.

Back in Las Palmas a cable awaited Commander John Kelly McTurk. He tore it open, and as he read, his red face, with its thousand tiny wrinkles, lit with ecstatic joy.

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Codrington. "Promotion? Have they posted you? I am sure you deserve it."

"No, that will come in its own good time. But I'm appointed to a ship, the *Chattanooga*, a fine great lump of a second-class cruiser, and I'm to join at once. By Glory, Lucy! if you only knew

what a struggle it's been for me to get back on the Active List!"

"Best congratulations, dear."

"It's this Graviola business that's brought my name to the memory of the Navy Board at last, and it's you I've to thank for that. I've done my best for you, but I do think you've been treated awfully badly. What with Stubbs and his steamer, and all those men, it will have cost you all of three-quarters of a million dollars, and all you've got in return is a barren island which is no mortal good to you or to any one."

"Yes, but, J. K., I think you may also say that I've got a man for my husband that I wanted very badly. And as for the financial part, we shan't do so very badly out of it after all. Come with me to my sitting-room, and I'll tell you all about it. I wonder what your gentle sister Bridget will say to me as Mrs. You?"

"Confound Bridget!" said Commander McTurk truculently. "Let me see. Look here, Lucy, we'll dodge Bridget. We'll get married first, and tell her afterwards. I'm hanged if I'm going to be bossed by Bridget any more."

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